

BROADWAY BILLY'S NOVEL CASE!

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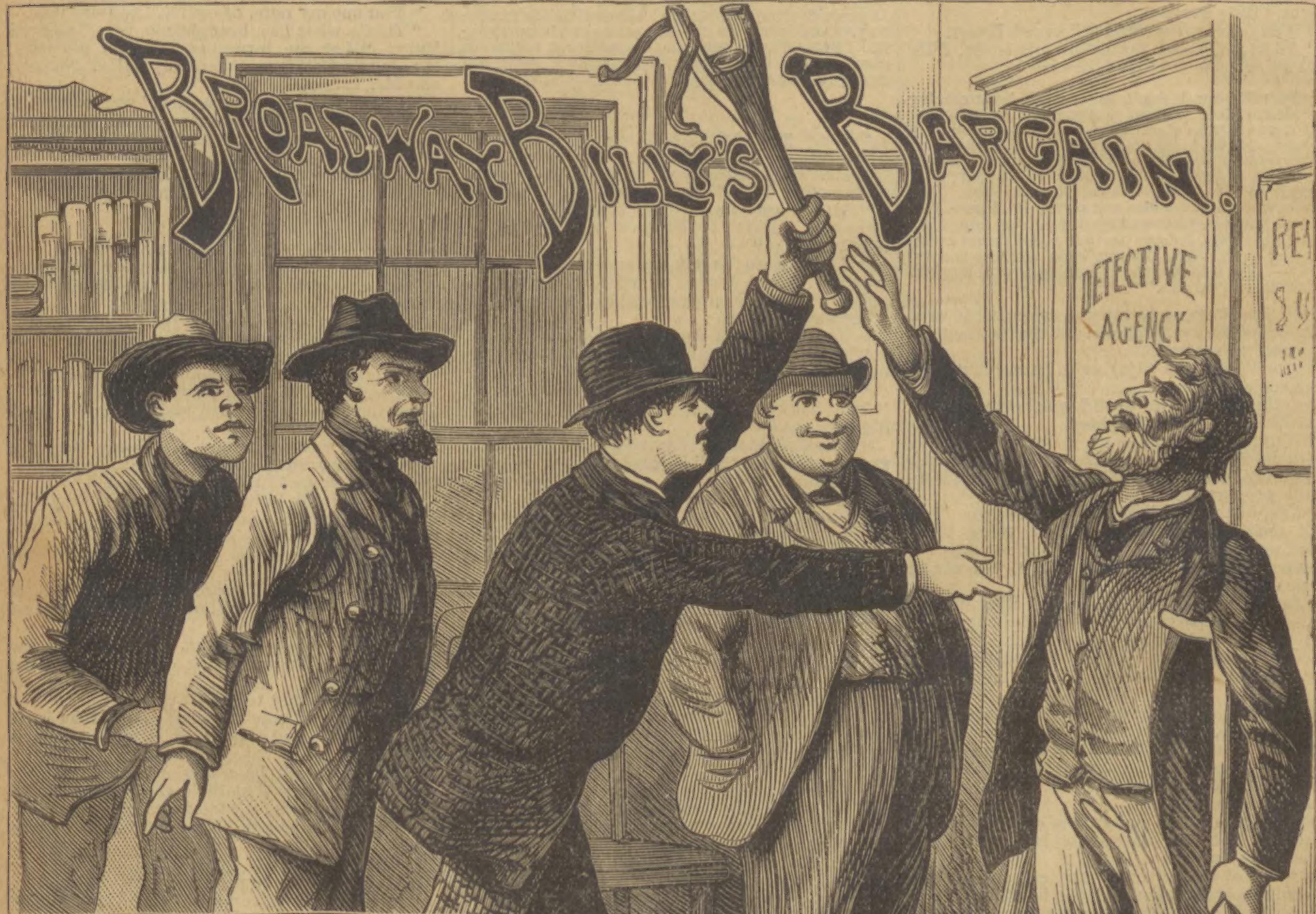
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OR,

The Three Detectives in Denver.

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AUTHOR OF "BROADWAY BILLY" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

BROADWAY BILLY SUMMONED.

BROADWAY BILLY, Skinny his partner, and their friend and comrade, Roger Watts.

Now located at a nice hotel, they were resting after the exciting adventures following their arrival at Denver.

It was a forenoon. Billy and Skinny were writing long letters home, while the old rover was lying on a lounge puffing away at a grateful pipe.

"NO PAY, NO LEG, OLD PINCH 'EM HARD!" AND BILLY SWUNG THE LEG MENACINGLY BEFORE THE OLD VILLAIN'S FACE.

Suddenly Billy burst out laughing.

"What's tber matter with you now?" inquired Skinny, looking up.

"Sweet pertaters! Skinny, that's rich, hang me fer a sick chicken if it isn't. Ha, ha, ha!"

"What is rich? What are you talkin' about?"

"Why, this here that I've just written about you."

"What is it? You had better be careful what you say about me. Besides, I want you to call me James."

"Oh, get out! That's too much trouble. James is only your Sunday name, anyhow, and boys like you are not supposed to wear their best on week days."

"I weigh more than you do, I guess, anyhow."

"Right you are, Skinny, and that's what makes it all the better."

"What is it now?" asked the old rover, knowing Billy had something to tell.

"Why, this that I have just written to my mother about Skinny," answered Billy, with another laugh.

"Well, let's hear it, if it's so good, so's we kin all laugh; hey, Skinny?" urged Roger, straightening up to listen.

"If it's anything about my gettin' fat I don't want to hear it," Skinny flatly declared. "If it isn't, he can do as he pleases about it."

"Not a word about your gettin' fat, honor bright," Billy averred.

"Well let's hear what it is," urged Roger.

"All right," and taking up his letter, Billy read an extract aloud as follows:

"Poor Skinny, I don't know what he is coming to. He is well at present writing, but he is so thin that it would take about three of his size to make a shadow. He isn't getting any thinner in flesh, for that is impossible. He hasn't any flesh on him any more. He is getting thin in one. It is a fact; he is wasting in a way that would surprise you. His clothes won't stay on him any more, and I have had to invent a wire frame which I put over him to fill them out. Why, I have to shake the sheets every morning to find him. I don't know what he is coming to—Yes I do, too; he is coming to nothing just as fast as ever he can."

"You don't mean to say you are going to send that home, do you?" demanded the fat lieutenant, half in anger.

Roger Watts was enjoying a hearty laugh on the lounge.

Anything Billy said or did was enough to set him off into a fit of laughter.

"Why, yes, to be sure," answered Billy. "What's the harm? It will be a good joke when you arrive and surprise them with your aldermanic proportions."

"Yes, but you ain't keepin' your word. You said you wouldn't never say anything more about my thinness. If you only knew what a chestnut that has come to be, Billy, you would choke off."

"Just like yourself," responded Billy, laughing. "Sweet pertaters! if I was half as big as you are I wouldn't care how much fun was made of what I used to be. I would eat and sleep just as sound, and be just as happy, you bet."

Just then there came a sharp rap at the door. "Hello!" exclaimed Billy, in undertone, "I wouldn't wonder if it's the mayor come to pay his respects to us. Sit up straight now, Skinny, and elevate your nose. Try and be somebody if you can for once."

Skinny jumped up and gave a kick at Billy as he passed, but Billy dodged out of the way and opened the door.

It was not the mayor of the city, of course, but only an ordinary messenger in uniform.

"Is Mr. Weston here?" the messenger asked.

"That's your's truly my little man," answered Billy, cheerfully.

"Then here's a note fer ye!"

Billy took the note and bade the lad step in a moment while he read it.

Skinny and the old rover were full of interest now, and were eager to know what it meant.

Billy read the message, while the others, watching his face for some sign, were completely disappointed, for never a muscle of his face moved, and there was nothing to indicate the import of the communication, so they had to await his pleasure.

Billy signed the boy's card and allowed him to go, and as soon as the door had closed the irrepressible ex-gamin began to execute a dance around the room.

"What's the matter with ye?" cried Skinny, in half disgust. "Are ye going out of yer mind?"

"It must be somethin' that tickles ye mighty much, I should say," ventured the old rover.

"Sweet pertaters!" ejaculated "Mr. Weston," waving the missive, "this is jest the stuff, and you hear me say so! It's no small beans ter be famous, you bet! We've got another case on hand, pard."

Skinny groaned, while Roger looked interested.

"What is it?" Skinny asked.

"Give it up," answered Billy.

"Don't it say what it is?" asked Roger.

"Nary a say. We have got to go and find out about that."

"Who is the note from?" demanded Skinny. "Come, we want to know all about it."

"Ther lad hits it right on tber spot," declared the rover. "I am p'izen eager ter know what ther news is."

"We've got a call, that's what the news is," affirmed Billy. "I tell you it is a big thing to be famous, and no mistake. Here's a message from a reg'lar detective askin' our help on a case. What do ye think of that?"

"Read it," urged Skinny.

"Yes, let's hear it," supported Roger.

Thus pressed, Billy struck an attitude and proceeded to read:

"MR. WM. WESTON:—

"DEAR SIR:—Knowing something about your ability in our line, I send for you to come and take a case off my hands. I am really too busy to attend to it, and the party is urging me every day. If you will come and see me I will explain the matter to you, and you then can suit yourself about trying it. I will tell you now that I consider it a difficult case to work up, and that it is a strange one I am sure you will agree when you learn about it."

"Yours very truly,
"DESMOND BRANDLAND."

"There you have it, and what do you think about it?"

"That's the same detective who was workin' on the other case, ain't he?" queried Skinny.

"Same name, anyhow, so I suppose it's the same man. Didn't believe he would speak to me, hardly, again."

"Ye want to be mighty sure thar ain't no trap fer b'ar set around nowheres," warned the old ranger. "Keep yer smeller well open, lad, is my advice."

"You scent danger on the air, do you?"

"No, not at all; but no harm done ter watch out a leetle fer dead-falls, or snap-dragon teeth."

"That's what's the matter," agreed Skinny. "Billy has one great fault, Roger, an' that ain't his only one."

"What's that one?" demanded the Broadway representative. "I'll be glad to have ye point it out to me, and if I don't pluck it up by the roots and cast it from me—"

"There, now, don't get tragic about it," Skinny interrupted. "I can tell you what it is in short order. You allus jump at a thing and shoot your gun off afore ye take aim."

"Sweet pertaters! is that ther solumn truth, Skinny?"

"It's the fact, all in one piece," Skinny averred, earnestly.

"And, if that's so, it is a bad fault, I allow," added the ranger. "You should allus go a leetle slow, lad, till ye know fer sure what sort o' game ye are on ther track of; and then ye don't want ter shoot too quick when ye sight it, but jest take a keerful aim and pull her off sorter slow and easy like."

"Anything more you two have got to say?" demanded Billy, with a good-natured grin.

"That's enough fer you ter digest at one time," decided Skinny.

"I'm not prepared to die jest yet, though, my gay and festive roly-poly, so it don't count this time."

"Don't," cried Skinny, waving his hand in protest. "Don't try to get off such puns as that. Give us one that can stand alone, or none."

"Well, no joking," said Billy, "I take this message to be the genuine article, and I'm going around to find out what is wanted. Will you go along with me and see it out?"

"Do ye want an old codger like me to chip in, lad?" asked the old ranger.

"You are one of the combination," reminded Billy.

"And such a shadow as I am!" from Skinny.

"You're my lieutenant," Billy assumed. "With all your faults, Skinny, I love ye still—the stiffer the better; and if there's danger on the breeze I'm willing to let you have a share of it."

"Oh, I haven't any doubt about that," asserted the lieutenant. "Well, I'll go along with you, for I am needed to hold you in check. I'm your safety-valve; without me you would blow up and go to the dickens in no time. I'm the check to your wild recklessness."

"All of which I freely admit, just to save argument," responded Billy. "I know you have a way of trotting out that wet blanket of yours at critical moments, and flinging it about a fellow in a way that's calculated to give him the chills on the spot and take all the ambition out of him. It seldom works that way with me, though, as perhaps you have noticed."

"And what is my standin' in ther company?" asked the rover. "Am I jest ther rank and file?"

"That's what you have been claiming all along," answered Billy, "but you deserve promotion. What would you like to be?"

"Waal, I dunno. S'pose you make me corporal first and see how I fit there, and then we'll see about further p'motion later on. How's that?"

"That will do, if it suits you; but now, let's get these letters finished, and then we'll attend to business."

They finished their writing, and then were ready to set out.

While the message had been addressed to Billy alone, he thought it must mean all of them, or anyhow he said so, and they all set out for the detective's office.

Billy had met the detective before, and so knew him at sight when he entered.

The officer was alone, and greeted Billy heartily.

"You got my note, of course," he remarked.

"That's what has brought me here," assured Billy. "Let me introduce my two partners, Mr. James Callahan, commonly called Skinny; and Mr. Roger Watts."

"Introduction is unnecessary," waived the detective, while at the same time he acknowledged it by shaking bands with them, "for the papers have introduced you only too well."

When all were seated, Billy announced that he was ready to hear what was wanted of him.

CHAPTER II.

SELIM MUDGEON'S CASE.

"You are ready for the case, are you?" observed Mr. Brandland, a smile playing upon his lips.

"That's what we're here for," Billy assured.

"We're the triangle from the East, ready to tackle anything that falls in our way."

"Anything?" with the smile broadening.

"Yes; anything that don't require a weak-kneed detective with mush and milk in his head in place of brains."

"Well, I won't ask you to promise you will take this case until you have heard what it is. I will give you a fair chance to refuse."

"All right; it isn't often we throw anything over our shoulders when there's fame and fortune at stake—particularly the latter."

"There's a thousand dollars for you in this case if you win it."

"Then we're the Bayards from New York to tackle it. Give us the busines end of it and we'll take bold."

"Don't be too sure about that," warned the detective. "You may back out of it the same as I am doing."

"Then you want to give it up, eh?"

"Yes; if you take it I want you to take it off my hands for good and all. I have had enough of it."

"Well, it can't be much of a case, then, or you would go for that little thousand, I should think. Or, maybe, it's too much of a case."

"That is where you hit it; it is too much of a case."

"Well, what is it?"

"That's what's the matter," urged Skinny.

"Ha! is the fever comin' on ye, Skinny?" Billy asked.

"If you can't call me by my right name in company, don't address me at all," demurred Skinny, with an air of injured dignity.

"Dear me, that boy is the nightmare of my existence!" sighed Billy. "You see he is getting fat, Mr. Brandland, and the fatter he gets the more particular he becomes. Before long he'll want me to call him Count, or Duke, or somethin' like that."

"But, let's hear what this thing is," put in the old ranger. "I am sort of interested in it myself."

"That's what I like to see," acknowledged Billy. "You see, Mr. Brandland, my two partners are eager to get at it, and that's a sure sign we're going to win the prize. Now set your mill a-going and unwind the thing to us. We're all attention and ready to hear it."

"Very well, here you are, then: In this city lives an old codger named Selim Mudgeon. He is rich, but as miserly as he can be. He is really too stingy to eat three square meals a day."

He would get along with one, and a half one at that, if he could. He is the man who has this case I want to get rid of, and who offers a thousand dollars to the man who will clear it up for him."

"He must want it done bad, if he is as stingy as you say."

"Stingy is no name for him. He never rides in a car because he would have to pay, and if he has very far to go, and the weather is at all favorable, he will take off his one shoe and carry it on his arm to save wear and tear."

"Sweet pertaters! he must be a terror. It's a wonder he don't wear paper covers over his spectacles for fear the air will damage them; that is, if he wears them at all."

"And he wears them, a pair of the very cheapest sort. He came here one day and wanted me to take his case. I didn't want it, but he hung on so that I took it, more to get rid of him than anything else. He didn't pay me anything down, but I have his written agreement that he is to pay me one thousand dollars cash upon the recovery of his stolen property."

"Hal! then it's a case of stolen goods, is it? Somebody been getting away with his strong box?"

The detective laughed.

"You could never guess it," he assumed. "He has met with a great loss, but not the loss of his money. If he were to lose his hoarded wealth he would die of a fit, I am sure."

"Then what is it? Lost his daughter? Some fellow been eloping with her, and he wants the fellow's head?"

"No, no; you are as wide of the mark as ever. Besides, he has no daughter; but he does boast of a son, whom he calls 'the boy,' though he can't be anything under forty years old. His son's name is Martin Mudgeon."

"Well, then, I give it up. Go on with your tale of woes."

"I will do so. Selim Mudgeon is a cripple—that is to say, he is minus a leg. He used to wear a common wooden leg, but of late he has been going without any. The fact of the business is, his wooden leg has been stolen from him, and it is for the recovery of that useful article that he offers the big reward!"

"Sweet pertaters!"

"No; a wooden leg."

"A thousand dollars for a wooden leg?"

"Yes; and that a battered old stump that wasn't worth a quarter."

"He must be crazy."

"Doesn't seem to be crazy."

"There's a button missing somewhere, I'll bet."

"Well, what do you say? Do you want to take the case and find his missing member for him?"

"See here," Billy suddenly cried, "are you trying to guy me? It looks more like that than anything else, seems to me."

"I thought you would suspect that," was the detective's response, "but on my word of honor I am not. I hold no ill will because you got ahead of me in that other matter."

"Well, I'll take you at your word. If you have picked me up for a flat, though, you may be glad to drop me for a sharp before you are done with me. I'm only giving you fair warning, and no boasting about it, either."

"You are no chump, Billy Weston, as I am well aware. I am not trying to impose upon you. What I have told you is the simple truth. The police won't have anything to do with old Mudgeon and his case, and neither would I until he had pledged himself for the thousand dollars."

"He must value the old peg, I should say."

"He seems to, and that's the fact. I put one of my men on it for a day or two, but we have been so busy since that I have not been able to spare him, and so this case has suffered. The old cove comes every day, however, to see how I am making out. Now, you have nothing to do, I take it, and are ripe for anything that promises fun and excitement, so I thought perhaps you would enjoy taking hold of the old rascal's odd case and giving it a turn."

"You call him an old rascal; is that what he is?"

"Well, I don't know anything to his damage in a criminal way, but I wouldn't trust him out of range, just the same."

Broadway Billy was beginning to be interested in the matter. Here was something so out of the usual line that it promised a good deal of novelty, to say the least.

"You say he comes here every day?" he questioned.

"Yes; and it is about time for him to put in an appearance now. If you decide to take the

matter in hand I will get the case for you when he comes."

"We'll try it, anyhow, just for the fun of it," declared Billy. "Now I can't think you are fooling about it, but if you are you will know that you have only done it at the cost of a lie. That's plain talk, and I'm a plain talker."

"I admire your downright fashion of putting things, Billy, and I don't blame you for feeling suspicious of me, for the case is odd enough to make you doubt it. It is a fact, however, and a genuine deal. You need not hesitate about taking hold of it if you feel inclined."

"Well, I'll take it."

"That settles it. Now, when he comes you must be here alone with me, and your partners can retire into that closet yonder. He won't talk if there are too many around to hear."

"All right. Skinny and Rover, you hear what the plan is."

"Yes, we hear," responded Skinny. "If you want to go hunting around after old wooden legs, you can, but I'm not in it."

"There, there, now, Fatty, you know you are blowing. You are jest crazy to get at the bottom of the old miser's mystery, and so am I. You'll be in it, when the ball begins to roll lively and the smoke begins to appear."

"I don't deny but I'm in it already," declared the old ranger. "I want ter know what be is so mighty anxious about an old wooden leg fer. A thousand dollars is a big price for a stump, I should say, when we kin get another fer an X."

"There is mystery behind it all, as you suspect," spoke up the detective, "although I have no idea what it can be. I have had no time to devote to it, you see, and it has been a bore to me, anyhow. But, it is time the old fellow was here, and you two had better get into the closet."

So, Skinny and the ranger went into the closet and drew the door almost to a close, as the detective directed.

"Now," said Brandland to Billy, "let me give you your cue. I will explain to the old fellow that I can't do any more for him in the matter, and will refer him to you. He will want to know all about you, and I'll tell him all he needs to know."

"Yes; and what then?"

"Well, he may turn right to you and take you to his bosom, so to say, or he may storm at me. It will depend upon his mood. But, as a proof of his meanness, you get him to make you an offer for the recovery of the leg. Don't forget that he has already bound himself to pay me a thousand dollars."

"All right; I guess I catch on."

"Of course you do. And, by the way, you are a shrewd one, and if you should find his old stump, don't deliver it until you get your money in hand. If it is worth a cool thousand to him, it is worth that to you. Don't let him get the best of you in the deal. But, the chances are that it won't be found."

"I'm of the same opinion; but if he regards that leg so highly, it must have some particular value, and maybe that's the reason it was taken. It is worth looking into, I believe, and I'll take a—"

"Sh! He is coming now."

A thumping and clicking was heard in the hall without, and pretty soon the door opened and a wretched-looking mortal entered the room.

He was a man with one leg, the leg of the trowser being pinned up behind to form something like a bag. He was wretchedly clad, and looked more like a mendicant than a rich miser.

He was about sixty-five years old, and might have been judged even older than that. Hair and beard were long and tangled; he wore a pair of the commonest steel bow glasses, and supported himself with a pair of rough homemade crutches which were anything but mates.

Ducking his head to the detective, he cast a searching look at Billy.

"Good-morning, Mr. Mudgeon!" the detective greeted.

"Good-morning, Mr. Brandland!" was the echo. "Anything to tell me by this time?"

"I have no news for you, sir," was the answer; "but come and sit down and I will talk with you. I have a proposition to make to you, Mr. Mudgeon."

CHAPTER III.

BILLY MAKES THE BARGAIN.

THE old miser swung himself along to a chair, on his sticks, tumbled into it, and dropped his propellers on the floor with a clatter.

"No news for me yet?" he snarled, in a high, cracked and querulous tone. "No news for me yet! What have you been doing all this time, I want to know? What is the reason you haven't news for me?"

"That is what I want to tell you, Mr. Mudgeon," answered the detective, in a quiet way. "I cannot seem to make any headway in your case, and the fact is it is entirely out of my line. I have made up my mind that I shall have to give it up. I can't make anything out of it."

"Give it up! Good heavens, you mustn't do that, Mr. Brandland! I tell you you mustn't do that! I will try and do a little better by you than agreed, if you will only find that lost article and restore it to me. I must have it, I tell you, and you must find it for me. I have got to have it before the twenty-fifth of this month or I am a ruined man!"

"Hal! you never told me that," said the detective, with some surprise.

"No; but I told you it was important, very. Now there are only twelve days left in which to find it."

"May I ask you why that wooden leg is so very important that your fortune depends on it if you do not get it within twelve days?"

The old miser had shaken his head, made faces, winked, and in other ways endeavored to keep the detective from saying anything in particular before Billy.

It was of no use, however, for Brandland had refused to notice him, but went right on with what he had to say, and when he had done calmly awaited the answer the old miser must make.

"Who is this young man?" the miser now snapped, with a jerk of his thumb toward Billy.

"You have heard all about the Cottrell mystery, of course?" questioned the detective, before answering.

"Yes, yes; but what do I care about that? Who is this young man, I demand, that you speak my business before him? Tell me."

"I am coming at that now, Mr. Mudgeon. This young gentleman is Mr. William Weston, the young detective who had the honor of clearing that mystery up."

Mudgeon hitched around in his chair and took a full look at Billy, which the New York ex-gamin met with his keen eyes and with full interest.

"Humph!" the miser grunted. "You don't say so!"

"Such is the fact. And now I will finish what I was about to propose to you. Since I must give up your case, Mr. Mudgeon, I would suggest Mr. Weston as the proper person to take it up for you."

"But, he's only a boy!"

"Don't fool yourself about that, sir. His face is youthful, I admit, but he is nearly twenty-one. Look at that width of shoulders. There is not much of the boy about him, sir."

"Humph! Would you undertake it, young man?"

"I might give it a twist around and see what's in it," answered Billy, carelessly.

"You might, hey? I have heard about your work on that other case, and you must know something. I have read about you in the papers."

"You take the papers, Mr. Mudgeon?" questioned the detective.

"Not I!" was the snapped response. "I am not in this world to be robbed, Mr. Brandland. I pick up one on the street occasionally, and so get all the news I want at no cost to me."

"But, sir, papers are cheap."

"Cheap? Robbery, sir, robbery—five cents, where two is enough!"

"Well, what do you say to making Mr. Weston your agent in this matter, and so letting me off? Really I have not the time to devote to it, and he can go right at it and give it his full attention. What do you say?"

"Do you think you could do it, young man?" to Billy.

"I can tell you better when I have heard what it is you require," answered Billy.

"Didn't you just hear Mr. Brandland say it is my wooden leg that I want him to recover for me?"

"Yes; but of course by wooden leg you mean your pocketbook, or something of that kind. A wooden leg isn't worth bothering about."

"It is a wooden leg nevertheless, and nothing else. It is my business whether it is worth bothering about or not. It is my wooden leg I want to find again, sir."

"Well, that's a great thing to engage a detective for, I must say. But, it is no business of mine, and I had as lief look for a wooden leg as a murderer, if there's money in it."

"Oh, I expect to pay for the service, of course."

"How much will you pay me?"

"Well, I will make the same arrangement with you that I made with Mr. Brandland here. If he found it I was to pay him; if not, then I owe him nothing."

"That's fair enough, I'm sure. How much will you make it worth to me if I will find that wooden leg and deliver it to you?"

"Well, let me see," and the miser looked at Brandland, whose face was as expressionless as a figure in marble, so far as change was concerned. He was simply listening.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," the miser said, after a pause. "You find that leg for me and deliver it to me, and I'll give you a hundred dollars cash down. What do you say? A hundred dollars is a big sum, my lad."

Broadway Billy smiled.

"You will have to bid higher than that, old man," he said. "I am not a day laborer."

"More than a hundred dollars! Goodness me! What are you thinking about, my son? And not a day laborer: bless me, bless me!"

"It's only a game of chance, anyhow," said Billy. "Maybe I won't find it at all, and then I'll be out. I wouldn't undertake it at all for that trifle."

"Goodness me! Well, then, how much do you want?"

"I'll make a bargain with you," said Billy, thoughtfully.

"Well, what sort of a bargain? Let me hear your terms."

"You want that lost leg of yours, and want it bad."

"Yes; I want it and must have it."

And you must have it inside of twelve days or it won't be of any use to you. Is that it?"

"That is it, exactly. I want it inside of twelve days or I don't want it at all."

"A funny leg it must be, that it will be worthless after twelve days, if you don't get it. But that's your business."

"Yes; that part of it is my business. It is my leg, and if I saw fit to offer a thousand for it, it's nobody's business but my own. But, then, that's not to be thought of."

"That's just the sum I mean to name, however," said Billy.

"A thousand dollars!"

"Exactly."

"Oh! you would rob me! You must be crazy!"

"Oh, well, if you think that's too high, why we will just let it drop."

"But think of it; only twelve days' work, and expect a thousand dollars for it. It's outrageous."

"Say no more about it, then," Billy waived. "I don't want the case very bad, anyhow. Give it to some Cheap John."

"A thousand dollars! Does the boy think I am made of money, Mr. Brandland?"

"I have been keeping still to let you make your own bargain with him," said the detective. "Do you want my opinion about it?"

"Yes, yes, by all means."

"Well, if you want that leg as badly as you pretend, and it is worth the money to you, I think you had better agree with Weston for that sum."

"But, he's only a boy, Brandland!"

"If he does a man's work he ought to have a man's pay."

"But, it isn't worth it. It isn't really worth even the hundred I offered him."

"You are the best judge of what it is worth."

"I'll make it five hundred dollars, young man."

"A thousand or nothing," declared Billy, fixedly.

"Six hundred. Say six hundred, and—"

"One thousand dollars, sir."

With a heavy sigh the miser gave in.

"Well, I suppose I'll have to come to your terms," he said, "for I must have that leg if it is possible to get hold of it."

"Then it's a bargain, is it?"

"Yes; I agree to it."

"Good enough. We'll have it drawn up in writing, and that will make it fair on both sides. If I find your wooden leg, you will pay me a thousand dollars on its delivery to you. If I don't find it, then you don't pay me anything at all."

"That is it."

"Then it's a bargain. Mr. Brandland, will you draw up the agreement?"

"With pleasure," the detective answered.

"Before you do so, Brandland, just deliver that paper you hold of mine," the miser requested.

"Certainly, Mr. Mudgeon," was the response; "here it is."

He took a paper from his desk and delivered it into the miser's hand.

The old man looked at it carefully, and proceeded to tear it into the smallest fragments.

The detective took pen and paper and began to write, and in a few minutes he had framed an agreement covering the ground.

When he had done he read it aloud.

It was about as Billy had stated the terms of his bargain.

If he found the old man's wooden leg and delivered it to him at any time within twelve days, he was to receive a thousand dollars, and the money was to be paid promptly on delivery, and in cash.

"Does that fill the bill?" he asked.

"That suits me, sir," answered Billy.

"Robbery! robbery!" sighed the old miser.

The detective laid the paper out for the old man to sign, and when he had put his name to it, Brandland put down his own as witness.

"That puts it right up in business shape," he remarked. "Now, Mr. Mudgeon, give the young man all the particulars of the matter and let him go to work on it. If anybody can find that leg for you he'll do it."

"I only hope he will," the old man sighed.

"Well, now I'm ready for business," said Billy. "Shall I go home with you, Mr. Mudgeon?"

"What would you go home with me for?"

"I want to see your place, and get the full particulars of the robbery. I must have the full thing in mind before I begin work."

"Just what Brandland's man said, and he hasn't done anything at all, it seems. But, come along, and I'll give you every chance in the world to get on the right track."

CHAPTER IV.

BILLY GETTING AT THE FACTS.

GETTING hold of his crutches, the old man got up and was ready to go.

Billy turned to Mr. Brandland to say something for the benefit of his two partners in hiding in the closet.

"Well, good-day, Mr. Brandland," he said. "If those two pards of mine come here looking for me you may tell them to wait for me at the hotel. I will join them there."

"All right, sir," was the detective's response. "I hope you will have success with Mr. Mudgeon's case and win your thousand dollars."

"Thank you," rejoined Billy. "I feel it in my bones that I am going to find that lost leg."

He and the old miser went out, and Skinny and Roger Watts come forth from the closet.

"That youngster is a caution, by the smoke o' Gittysburg he is!" the old ranger exclaimed. "He has got a head on his shoulders that ain't a turnip, not by no manner o' means. See ther way he let us know whar to meet him."

"It was not slow," the detective agreed.

"And you can bet that Billy ain't slow at anything," declared Skinny, with a burst of pride. "I wouldn't say so before him, but he is the quickest lad you ever saw in your life. When he don't get there you can make up your mind that it's no use for anybody else to try."

"He is certainly making famous headway as a detective, for a young man of his age," observed the detective. "I predict that when he gets home again he will go into the business regularly. If he does that, I am sure he will be a rousing success in the detective field. By the way, you had better wait a few moments before you go out."

"That's so," agreed Skinny. "The old codger might see us."

So they remained a few minutes to allow Billy time to get out of sight, and then left the office and returned to the hotel.

Meanwhile, Billy, when he and the old miser had reached the street, had stopped and inquired how far it was to their destination. Being told, he suggested taking a car.

"A car!" gasped the old man. "I never ride in a car."

"But, they go near your place, don't they?" asked Billy.

"They go right by the door, but I never ride. Robbers, sir; robbers!"

"Well, I'm willing to be robbed," Billy declared. "I'll pay your fare, old man, so just indicate the right car and we'll get aboard."

Under these conditions the old miser had no objections, and he and Billy were soon aboard of one of the cable cars and rolling away toward the old man's habitation.

They did no talking on the way, and finally the old miser indicated their arrival at the place of their destination and the car stopped and they got out.

Billy looked around to pick out his patron's dwelling.

Near at hand was a rusty-looking building, with shops on the ground floor.

One of these was a Chinese laundry, while the other was occupied by a cobbler. A narrow hall ran between.

Entering the hall, the old miser led the way toward the rear, where the stairs went up, and Billy noticed that the rooms in the rear were occupied by still other businesses.

On the left of the hall, at the rear, was a junk-dealer's den, while on the right was the headquarters of a tinker, a Jack-at-all-trades, whose sign was an umbrella in the last stages of dilapidation, and who as they entered, was enjoying the pleasure of beating his wife.

It was plain that the old miser was making his house bring him in all the money it possibly could in its dilapidated state of repair.

"Don't mind that woman's yelling," he said to Billy, seeing that he stopped at the foot of the stairs, as if inclined to interfere. "Her old man is licking her. If you went in they'd both pitch into you. Don't mind them."

On second thought Billy considered it none of his business, so followed the miser up the stairs.

The next floor showed evidence of being full of families, and it looked as though there was a family to every room.

Billy was disgusted with what he saw, and almost wished he had never taken hold of such an unpromising case as the hunt for a wooden leg.

Already he detested the old miser heartily, and believed that he was a rascal at heart, capable of any meanness for the sake of a paltry dollar. Billy had no sympathy with him.

And what was there in a wooden leg that could lead him to offer such a sum for it? Billy believed there must be some valuable paper hidden in the old stump, perhaps a will, a deed, or something of that sort.

"Come right this way," the old miser croaked, when they reached the top of the flight, and he led the way toward the rear.

There he opened a door, disclosing a single room, which, like the Irishman's shanty, was kitchen and parlor and bedroom in one. And the foul air was sickening.

Billy held his breath till he reached a window, which he threw wide open.

"What are you doing that for?" the old man demanded sharply.

"Why, I generally depend on breathing to live," Billy answered, "and when I breathe I want air."

"But, you will make my room damp and I'll catch cold," the old man protested. "I can't run such a risk as that."

"No danger of that such a day as this," said Billy. "Anyhow, you will have to keep it open while I stay here, that's a sure thing."

The miser grumbled, but did not protest further, and dropping his crutches in a corner he hopped to a chair and sat down.

The room had a battered and broken stove, two rickety chairs, an apology for a table, and a bed of straw in one corner on the floor. A cupboard in one corner was responsible for the odors, mainly.

"Well, now to business," the old man said, as soon as seated.

"Yes, just as quick as possible," agreed Billy.

"Tell me your story, straight and brief."

Billy wanted to cut his stay there as short as possible.

He did not believe that his shadow would ever fall upon the wall of the old man's room again.

"My wooden leg was stolen from me about five weeks ago, and since that time I have been depending upon Brandland's men to find it for me. I have come to the conclusion that they are no good."

"Hunting wooden legs is a new business for detectives," reminded Billy. "It has, so to say, stumped them, perhaps."

"Young man, this is a serious matter. Your levity is out of place. You must know that I value that old leg highly, when I am willing to give a thousand dollars for its return."

"I can well believe that. What is there about it to make it so valuable? I must know that if I am to succeed at all in my search for it."

"Why must you know?"

"It will be a big help to it at Now, suppose your will is hidden in that old stump—"

"Who said there was anyting hid in it?"

So the old man interrupted, with a snap, his face showing something akin to alarm at the young detective's guess.

"Nobody has said so," responded Billy, his face remaining without a readable sign of his thoughts.

Billy knew well enough now that his guess must have been pretty close to the truth.

"Well, what good would it do you to know it, if my will is in the old leg?" the old man demanded. "It is the leg you are to hunt for."

"Just so," said Billy. "If I knew your will was in it, however, I would not look for a man who wanted your wooden leg for the sake of the leg, but for the sake of getting hold of the will."

The old man was thoughtful.

"You are nobody's fool, young man," he presently said. "You have struck the nail right on the head, I believe. You look at the matter just as I look at it myself. But, the fact of the matter is, there is no will in the old leg, so you are off the track there."

"Maybe, then, it's a Government bond for a million or so."

"Do I look like a millionaire?" demanded the miser.

"No; but I'll bet you have got a nest egg laid by somewhere, and maybe it's in the old leg."

"Wrong, young man, wrong. What is in that leg is of no value to anybody but me."

"Then why was it stolen from you?"

"That is what I want to know?"

"You have admitted that there is something hid in the old leg."

"When did I admit anything of that kind?" cried the miser. "I haven't said so yet."

"It isn't necessary to say so. I know it, and you haven't denied it. You say it is not your will; then what is it?"

"Never mind what it is; all you are to do is to find the leg."

"And I won't move a peg toward finding your old stump till you tell me the whole secret of it," Billy flatly declared.

"But, I have got to have that wooden leg, young man; I have got to have it, I say, and that before twelve days pass. You must find it for me."

"If you are so anxious to get hold of it, then do all you can toward helping me to get on the right track of it. Perhaps it is some bit of rascality you are up to, the proof of which is in the old leg."

The old man looked startled again, but he quickly denied that.

"No, no," he protested, "it is nothing like that. Confound it, young man, I see you are bound to have the truth out of me."

"If you expect any help from me you must make up your mind to trust me," the young detective declared earnestly.

"I see you are right, and I will do so. That wooden leg does not contain a will, but a paper of much value, and one which must be in my hands before twelve days expire."

"Now we are coming at it, old man, and there is some chance of getting a fair start. Now, who will benefit by it if you don't get that paper in the time you have mentioned? That's the next point."

"Young man, I begin to have hopes that you will be able to serve me in this matter. You have the right way of going about it."

"Maybe so; we'll see."

"Well, the person who will benefit by the loss is Colonel Jonas Gaston."

"Colonel Jonas Gaston, eh? I will remember that name. Now, who is he and where can he be found?"

"You jump right to the conclusion that he must know something about the missing leg, do you?"

"I think it probable that he may, sir."

"Then let me set you right. He knows nothing about it whatever. He does not know the paper has gone out of my hands."

CHAPTER V.

GETTING STARTING POINTS.

BROADWAY BILLY whistled.

This balked his first thought, that Gaston must have stolen it.

But, the old man might be mistaken. He might be too confident in what he set down for a fact.

"How do you know that?" he asked.

"Because I have been to see him, and I know he couldn't deceive me. I know him too well for that."

"You may be mistaken."

"No, I am not."

"Well, I'll have to take your view of it for the present. Now, besides this Colonel Gaston, who else could have any object in taking your old leg?"

"Well, possibly his daughter, but I think not."

"How is she concerned?"

"The paper is worth as much to her as it is to her father, and maybe more, if she has a mind to think so."

"Well, do you think she has had a hand in its disappearance?"

"No, I don't think so; yet maybe she had."

"What sort of persons are these Gastons?"

"Poor, sir; poor and proud of it."

"Proud of being poor?"

"Well, I mean to say they are poor but proud and tony-like. It hurts the colonel to think that I hold the little joker over him."

"But, you don't hold it, it seems."

"He is none the wiser. Oh, I have seen him, and I know what I'm talking about. He would be crazy with joy if he knew I have lost the paper."

"Maybe he is playing you. Maybe he does know it, and is too keen for your old eyes. He may be laughing in his sleeve at you."

"Curse him!" grated the old miser, "if I thought that was so I would make him sweat, you can bet."

"Then you have some other hold upon him besides?"

"No; but I would have revenge."

"I see you are not disposed to tell me everything about the affair."

"What's the use? You know all about the paper, and who the parties concerned are."

"Well, let's take a look at it from another point?"

"What is that?"

"When was this leg taken?"

"About five weeks ago."

"How was it taken?"

"At night, while I was asleep."

"Was it on your stump at the time?"

"No; I always took it off at night."

"Where did you keep it?"

"Under the straw of my bed, there."

"You don't know how it was taken, eh?"

"No; it was gone in the morning when I woke up."

"Was the door open?"

"No; it was locked and bolted."

"Well, this begins to look like a mystery."

"You will find that it is a mystery before you are done with it."

"How do you suppose the thief got into the room?"

"I don't know. I can't imagine now."

"By the window, perhaps."

"There is no way to get up there."

Billy looked out and agreed in that. There was no visible way.

"Then it is a complete mystery to you, is it?" Billy asked. "You can't explain how the leg was taken out of the room?"

"It is a puzzle to me. I have tried hard to think how it was, but impossible. If you can tell me of any possible way, young man, I shall have some faith in your ability."

Billy got up and examined the door.

It had an extra-heavy lock on it, and bolts besides.

"Do you always put on these bolts at night?" he inquired.

"Never miss it," was the answer.

"Were they on the morning after the leg was taken?"

"Yes."

"Well, it begins to look peculiar. You are sure your leg was under the straw that night, of course."

"As sure as I am that it is gone now."

"And there don't seem to be any doubt about that. Now, does your son have free access to your room?"

"Yes; when I am here."

"But at no other time?"

"No other time."

"Have you any friends who visit you?"

The old miser laughed a dry, hacking sort of laugh.

"Not many," he answered, "not many. Do I look like an entertainer?"

"Not very much, that's a fact; still I thought you might have some cronies in your own station of life."

"No, sir, none. My only callers are my son and Daniel Hummon."

"And who is Daniel Hummon?"

"One of my lodgers."

"You take in lodgers?"

"Yes. A poor man must turn an honest penny, you know. I have the top floor of my house partitioned off into small rooms, with straw beds in them like mine, only better, and I let them out by the night or by the week."

"How much do you charge?"

"Ten cents a night, or half a dollar a week. Hummon is a monthly, the only one I have. I

charge him only two dollars a month, which is dirt cheap."

"You make a reduction in his case, eh?"

"Yes; and a liberal one, as you can see. Hummon is a man who has been unfortunate, and I feel sorry for him."

"In what way unfortunate?"

"In business. Heavy losses and foreclosure."

"Yes; I see. But, it is foolishness to suspect him or your son of having robbed you of your leg."

"Utter foolishness, sir. Hummon is an innocent old chap, and the boy, my son, I mean, is as much interested in my having that paper as I am myself."

"How is that? Is it valuable to him, too?"

"Yes; but only through me. It would do him no good if he had it himself."

"It is a peculiar paper, I should say."

"Yes; it is a peculiar paper, you are right. No; you cannot suspect either one of them, for they did not know I had such a paper, and least of all that I kept it hid in my wooden leg."

"It grows deeper at every step, it seems to me," mused Billy.

"You may be sure that I would never have gone to the police, and then to private detectives, if it had not been too deep for me."

"I can well believe that. Did you tell the police all you have told me?"

"No; I merely told them I wanted my wooden leg back."

"And they evidently didn't make such of an effort."

"That is about it, for I did not offer them reward. Wheu I went to Brandland, however, then I had to make a bargain with him, and had to tell him a good deal."

"You told him about the paper and this Colonel Gaston?"

"No; I merely told him the leg was valuable, as he could see for himself when I was willing to pay big for its recovery."

"Well, you should have told him everything. No one can expect a detective to do much on a case unless he has a full knowledge of it."

"But, they didn't ask questions like you have, young man. You have got the whole secret out of me, and I hope you will be able to do something for me."

"Sweet pertaters!" exclaimed Billy. "I have only just begun to get at the secret, old man. You haven't told me the nature of that paper yet, and why Colonel Gaston would be interested in having it back again."

"And I am not going to. You know too much already. That is, I am not going to tell you unless I have to."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, if you don't seem to get along, after a few days, then maybe I'll tell you everything, if you think it will help you."

"You will then have lost just so much valuable time, old man."

"I will risk that. I begin to have confidence that you are going to recover my leg with the knowledge you now have."

"You think, then, that some agent of Colonel Gaston's has taken it."

"Bless me, young man, haven't I told you that I know he has had nothing to do with it?"

"Still, you suspect him all the same, since he is the only one interested in it. I can read your thoughts like a book."

"Well, have your own way about it. All I ask is that you find the leg and restore it to me."

"Then you have told me all you can or will tell me, eh?"

"Exactly. Go to work and see what you can do."

"There are some other questions I must ask."

"Well, what are they?"

"Where does this Colonel Gaston live?"

The old miser gave his address.

"And you say he is poor," Billy mused.

"Yes. Like old Hummon, he has had business troubles, and has lost a fine fortune. He is now an employee in a big store on Seventeenth."

"And his daughter?"

"Lives at home and keeps his house for him."

"All right, I shall have to pay them a visit in a quiet way."

"Goodness me!" the old miser explained, "what will you go and see them for? I don't want you to go there, young man."

"You don't? Why not?"

"Dog-gone it, son, you will let the cat out of the bag. You will let them find out that I have lost the paper!"

"Trust me for that," and Billy smiled at the idea.

"But, what do you want to go there for? I have told you all you need to know, haven't I?"

"Well, hardly."

"What more do you want to know, then?"

"You haven't told me where the lost leg is, have you? I want to find that little secret out. We have made our bargain, old man, and I am going to work to suit myself."

"Well, well, you are a strange boy. When can I look for you to report?"

"Oh, in a day or two," Billy answered. "I'll drop in on you here and let you know how the case comes on."

So, after a little further talk, Billy took his leave.

CHAPTER VI.

BEGINNING THE BUSINESS.

BILLY had no sooner closed the door than he heard the old miser shut the window with a bang.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy muttered to himself, "it's a wonder he don't die, the way he shuts himself up in his den with all its evil smells, I couldn't stand it there an hour."

He passed down the stairs and out.

The tinker had by this time finished beating his wife, and the old barracks was comparatively quiet. Billy was glad to get out into the open air again, and proceeded to disinfect his lungs immediately by taking several good, full breaths.

In due time he was at the hotel, where Skinny and Roger were anxiously awaiting his return.

"Waal, me son," drawled the old ranger, "I see you are back again all safe and sound, with no bones broken. What did ye find out?"

"We orter put a mark down for him, by ginger!" cried Skinny. "I expected nothin' else than that we'd have ter go and get him out of some sort of a scrape."

"And jest as like as not you will have to do that yet, my gay and festive baby elephant," said Billy. "I am on the rampage for wooden legs now, and I'm going to get there or bu'st."

"Well, how did old Stingy pan?" asked Roger.

"He's the meanest man on the face of the earth," Billy declared flatly.

"Jest like the detective said of him, eh?" chipped in Skinny.

"Worse," said Billy. "He sleeps on the floor on a bundle of straw, and he never opens the window for fear of making the room so cool that he will have to make a fire."

"Great ginger!"

"And that don't begin to tell how mean he is," Billy went on. "Why, if a hungry dog brings a bone into his back yard he will go down with a club and drive the dog away and take the bone himself."

"Ain't that jest a leetle too thick?" asked the ranger, meekly.

"That don't begin to express it yet," Billy averred. "He don't breathe as often as ordinary people. He thinks that by skipping a breath now and then he is getting a stock ahead and will live so much longer."

"Can't you do a little better than that, if you try?" Skinny asked.

"I might," Billy answered, smiling, "but I wouldn't want to tell you anything that would make you doubt my veracity, you know. The way he lures cats and dogs to his room and eats them is a caution, to say nothing of—"

"There, there," protested the ranger. "We'll take yer word fer all the rest of it; eh, Skinny?"

"May as well take his word as his bond," answered Skinny. "Neither one is good for anything."

Billy continued his jesting for some minutes, but finally came around to the story of his visit to the old miser's domicile.

He told it in full, about as it has been set forth, expressing his opinion on the various points as he went along.

When he had done he leaned back and waited for the others to comment.

"I'll tell you what it is, Billy," Skinny soon spoke up.

"Well, my gay and festive roly-poly, what is it?" Billy inquired.

"If there is a rascal in this game, Mudgeon is the man, that's what it is."

"Skinny, we are of the same mind," declared Billy. "He looks the rascal in his eyes, and a rascal I believe he is."

"Then I'm surprised at you, Billy."

"S'prised at me?"

"Yes."

"What has s'prised ye, Skinny?"

"Ain't you ever going to call me by my name?"

"Yes, once in a while when I can think of it. It will take a good while for the force of habit to wear off, you know."

"Well, as I was going to say, I am surprised that you should take a rascal's case. When you had sized him up why didn't you drop it like a hot potato?"

"Sweet pertaters! what—"

"Any kind of potato," Skinny broke in.

"Oh, say, now, you are getting too smart," protested Billy. "You will die of it if you don't mind."

"Well, what were ye goin' to say?"

"I was going to ask you if you ever knewed me to cast my vote on any other side than the side of justice, truth and right. Did ye? I guess not."

"That's where I'm surprised. Why don't you drop old Mudgeon?"

"Skinny, you don't seem to be acquainted with me yet, after all these years that I have cared for you like a father. If there's a rascal in the game, it follows that there must be a decent fellow somewhere, don't it?"

"That is 'most allus the case."

"Jest so. Well, if Mudgeon isn't the decent fellow, an' Colonel Gaston is, why Gaston is the man I'll work for, don't you see? If Mudgeon is trying to injure an honest man, he's got me to buck against, and that's all. But, what do you think of the colonel?"

"May be as bad as the miser."

"That remains to be seen. I am going to interview him this afternoon, or his daughter, if he isn't at home."

"What are you going to say to him?"

"There, now, no use asking me that," Billy declared. "I'll have to think up some pretty good story of some sort, or take the first thing that pops into my mind, as I have done many a time before."

"And you think he'll take you to his bosom, do you, and let you into the whole secret?"

"Not at all, my jolly lolly-whop. I'll take him to my bosom—or his daughter, if he isn't at home; I'll get the secret out of him somehow. Then when I have got at the bottom facts, as the pickaninny said when he got inside the molasses barrel, I can soon scoop in the side pickings."

"Well, I hope you'll have luck, that's all. Seems Roger and me ain't to come in for any of the fun."

"I don't know about that. No knowing what will turn up. But, say, Skinny—I mean James: will you do something for me?"

"What is it?"

"Get my old bootblack rig out of the trunk and see if it can be used."

"Great smoke! you ain't going to put that on, are ye?"

"That's the plan at present, my gallant alderman."

"Then you and I part company, that's all."

"You won't do it?"

"Not a bit."

"Skinny, I didn't think you'd go back on me like that, after all I've done for you—"

"But, hang it, Billy, you won't be fit to be seen in that rig. And as fer goin' ter see the colonel in such a rig—he would set the dogs on you! It ain't to be thought of, Billy."

"Skinny, you are too previous. You have fired your gun before you got ready, as you say I have a way of doing. Who has said anything about going to see the colonel in bootblack attire? You didn't hear me say anything of the kind, that's sure."

"I'll bet you did, then, and I'll prove it by Roger."

"I opine that's what he said," Roger attested.

"Hold hard on your off boss for just a minute," said Billy, raising his finger to check them. "I said I was going to see Mr. Gaston, didn't I? And then I asked Skinny if he would get out my bootblack rig, didn't I? But I didn't say I was going to put it on now. If I wanted to use it now I could get it myself, couldn't I?"

"Then when are you going to use it?" demanded Skinny.

"I'm going to use it to-night, if everything hangs together till then. I'm going to take lodgings at Miser Mudgeon's."

"Then why didn't you say so?" Skinny complained.

"Sweet pertaters, you didn't give me time. The bigger you get the harder it is to keep you under. I don't know what I'll do with you if you keep on growing. But, will you get the duds out this afternoon while I'm out?"

"S'pose I'll have to. to keep peace in the family."

"That's a good fellow. I guess I can get into them yet. It's mighty sure that you couldn't get into yours, though."

It was past noon now, and while they were talking the summons to dinner was heard.

That was an item too important to be slighted, and they lost no time in getting to their places at the board.

After dinner Billy took leave of his companions and bent his steps in the direction of Colonel Gaston's residence, and in due time was at the door.

In response to the ring the door was opened by a good-looking young lady whom Billy took to be the colonel's daughter, and it was soon shown that he was not mistaken.

"Is this the residence of Colonel Gaston?" Billy asked.

"It is, sir," was the gracious response.

"Is he at home?"

"No, sir; he is at business. He will be at home after five o'clock."

"May I ask," Billy went on, "whether you are Miss Gaston? Perhaps you can inform me in regard to what I desire to know."

"I am Miss Gaston," was the assurance. "Will you step in, sir?"

Billy complied with the invitation and stepped into the hall, where he stopped with hat in hand.

The young woman asked him into a sitting-room, but he declined, since he could ask his questions in a minute or less.

"Your father," he observed, "has had some business dealings with a man named Selim Mudgeon."

He noticed that the young lady gave a start.

"You are right," she answered. "That miserable wretch was the cause of poor father's ruin. What do you know about it all?"

"I am not prepared to say, just now. If, however, your father has been wronged by that man, it may be in my power to do him a good turn. I cannot be sure of that yet."

"Oh! sir, if you only could!"

"There is some business between them yet that is not settled, I believe, is there not?"

"I do not know, but I hope not. I do know, however, that father is greatly worried over something, a secret which he keeps from me. Do you know what it is?"

"No, I do not," answered Billy. "I only know that Selim Mudgeon holds your father in his power, in some way, and that twelve days may see your father in more trouble than he is now."

CHAPTER VII.

AN ACQUAINTANCE BY CHANCE.

BROADWAY BILLY had made up his mind to one thing—that the old miser was the rascal, as Skinny had hinted, and that Colonel Gaston was the injured party.

Of course he had none of the particulars of the matter yet, but he had the word of this pretty young lady that such was the case, and he knew that she was the soul of truth and honor.

Billy was quick to read faces. He could "size up" a person at sight, and seldom made a mistake.

Still, it would require a personal interview with the colonel to confirm his judgment or inference, in the matter.

At his last remark the girl paled.

"Can it be true?" she gasped. "Is poor father still in that rascal's power? And are you friendly disposed toward my father?"

"It is all true enough," Billy assured. "Whether I am for your father or against him, will depend upon what the facts of the case are. If it is as I suspect, then I am for him, tooth and nail!"

"And what do you suspect?"

"That he is far more deserving than Selim Mudgeon."

"Heavens! there can be no comparison. My father is a gentleman, and the best of men. He is as honest as the sun."

"If that's the fact, then I am for him, that's all. But, I will call again and see him. You may tell him that a young stranger has called, and so put him in readiness to receive me when I come again."

"Who shall I say called?"

"I prefer to remain unknown," answered Billy. "You may let your father know what I have made known to you, and perhaps he will tell you all. I am inclined to believe that it is something that concerns you."

"Concerns me?"

"Yes."

"How can it concern me?"

"I am not prepared to say, since I do not know."

Billy had now laid his hand on the door to depart, and the young lady put her hand gently on his arm.

"If you can do anything to save my father from the power of that miserable old miser and scoundrel, will you not do so?" she asked.

"I will," Billy promised, "and I'll make it hot for the old close-fist, too, if I find that he is doing anything that isn't according to Hoyle. Excuse me if I'm a little blunt with my tongue." And Billy took his leave.

"Sweet pertaters!" he exclaimed to himself, when he got away from the place, "what a pair of eyes she had! William, you have been and gone and made a fool of yourself, that's what you have. Here you have made a promise to that girl and you don't know anything about her dad yet. But, go slow; you don't often make a mistake, and I'm betting rocks that Gaston is the man who has the best claim to your sympathy."

He had not proceeded far when he was overtaken by a rather dissipated man of some forty years, one who in dress tried to maintain his youth as much as possible, and who sported a nicely waxed mustache.

Billy heard his steps behind him, and turned just as the man laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Who are you, young fellow?" the man roughly demanded.

"I'm not your property, that you have any right to lay hold upon me," was Billy's sharp retort.

He had turned as he spoke and sent the man's hand flying from his shoulder with no gentle thrust, and his black eyes flashed menacingly.

"Well, you needn't be so mighty sassy about it," the man growled.

"Keep your hands to yourself, then," was Billy's advice.

"See here, youngster," the fellow threatened, "if you are not careful you will find yourself in the gutter."

"It will take more than you to put me there," retorted the young New Yorker. "What have you got to say to me? What did you want when you stopped me?"

"You think it would, eh? You talk pretty brave, and that's a fact. What do I want, eh? What business had you at that house back there? That's what I want to find out?"

"Well, that's light and cool, I must say, as the sleep-walker said when he woke up and found himself parading in undress with the zero down to thermometer. Your want will be your master this time, old boss, and don't you forget it. Who the dickens are you, anyhow?"

"Be my master, will it?" the fellow gnashed, and he reached forward to take hold of Billy's collar, but a sharp rap in on the forearm made him draw back with pain.

"Hands off!" Billy warned, menacingly.

"What did you do that for?" the man cried out.

"To teach you that you can't handle me as you please," was the retort.

"Are you going to answer my question?"

"Nixey!"

"I'll make you sorry, if you don't."

"Go right ahead with your circus. There will be sorrow on both sides, perhaps."

"I want you to tell me what you went into that house for?"

"None of your business," snapped Billy.

"You understand?"

"I'll make you tell me."

"Go ahead. I like the exercise."

"Do you mean to defy me, youngster?"

"That's about it, oldster!"

Not many persons were passing, and so far their tones had not been loud.

"If you don't tell me I'm going to strike you," the fellow gave warning. "I mean to know."

"Before you proceed to harsh measures," suggested Billy, mildly, "suppose you tell me who you are, and by what right you make your demand."

"I don't recognize your right to question me."

"That's just the way I feel about it myself," rejoined the young detective.

"But, I'll tell you who I am, and by what right I ask, since you are so very stubborn."

"That is more like it," Billy pacifically observed. "Perhaps we can come to some understanding yet. In fact I am sure we can."

Billy had an object in view, now. He proposed to know who this personage was, who questioned his right to call at the residence of Colonel Gaston.

Perhaps this was something that would give him a clew to other things. Anyhow, it would

not do to allow the man to escape till he had learned who and what he was. It would not be business-like.

"Yes, I'll tell you who I am," the fellow repeated. "My name is Martin Mudgeon, and that young lady you were talking to is to become my wife. I demand—"

"Oh—ho!" exclaimed Billy. "So, you are 'the boy,' are you? An old-looking boy you are!"

The fellow drew back in amazement.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "Do you know me?"

"I never had the honor of meeting you before," Billy answered, "but I happen to know you, now that you have told me your name. You are the son of Selim Mudgeon, I take it."

"You are right; and now, who in the name of mischief are you?"

"Let me tell you who I am not, first. I am not your rival for that pretty girl, as you seemed to suspect, so there is no need for you to feel uneasy on that score."

"That's all right; but tell me who you are."

Billy had been trying to frame some plan of procedure, and now believed he had it outlined.

"Let's walk on together," he suggested, "and I'll tell you. Lucky we didn't come to blows, for I guess we'll be friends, if you are willing."

They started on.

"Friends? I'll have to know you, first. I don't cotton to every Jack who makes himself known to me."

"I should judge not, by the looks of you," was Billy's calm retort. "Well, my name is Billy Weston, though I'm better known as Broadway Billy."

"Broadway Billy?—You?" and the man stopped short in his amazement.

"You know me, do you?" Billy asked. "We're about even, then."

"Know you! Don't everybody in Denver know you? I am more curious than ever to know why you were at that house."

"Before I explain that," Billy parleyed, "I must know whether you and your dad are on good terms or not. How is it?"

"We are on good enough terms."

"Does he bring out the old stocking for you occasionally?"

"What the deuce do you mean?"

"I mean does he fork over the ducats whenever you make a demand on his bank account?"

"You seem to be asking what is none of your business."

"I'm trying to make it my business, however, you see. I must be posted or I can't tell you what my errand was at Gaston's house."

"Well, confound it, I never get anything out of the old man, then. What I have I make myself. Don't you know how close he is? If you know him at all you can't help knowing that."

"I did notice that he was rather sticky," Billy admitted. "Now, do you and the old gent pull together in business matters? Has he any secrets from you? For instance, anything concerning the Gastons?"

"See here, you are trying to pump me," the man exclaimed, suspiciously.

"That seemed to me to be what you were trying to do with me, and you commenced operations with a force pump, too."

"Well, hang it, I know the old man is trying to help me to win that young lady for my wife."

"Ho! then your marrying her is not a certainty, eh? From the way you spoke, I thought it was all cut and dried."

"And it is, too. She has got to marry me. The old man is forcing things, and he knows what he is doing. The girl herself is a little shy."

"Doesn't take to you fondly, as it were. I see, and I can sympathize with you in your situation. I have been there myself times without number. The love was all right on my part, but the girls wouldn't respond with the gentle passion. It's an awful fix to be in."

And Billy said it all as soberly as a judge.

CHAPTER VIII.

BILLY INTERVIEWS GASTON.

"SEE here," demanded "the boy," after a pause, "are you trying to make sport of me?"

"Nary," Billy drawled. "You are getting too old, I should guess, to be made sport of. I was talking about myself."

"All right, we'll let it pass. You are a great fellow, according to the papers, but you don't want to make the mistake to think you can impose upon me."

"I wouldn't think of such a thing," Billy earnestly declared. "But, do you think your

governor is going to bring the shy young thing around so that she will be willing to marry you?"

"He swears that he can do it, and that he will do it."

"Then there must be something in it. Do you know what his hold upon Gaston is?"

"It seems to me that you want to know a good deal. I won't answer anything more till you give some information yourself."

"Well, the thing hinges right here," said Billy. "I can't let you into my secret till I am sure your dad would want you to know all about it. Do you know he has lost his wooden leg?"

"Confound you, what do you know about him and his wooden leg?"

"Well, he has employed me to find it, that's all, if you must know."

The man whistled.

"So, that's the way it is, is it?" he mused.

"That is just it," Billy affirmed.

"But that was not what took you to Gaston's."

"Nothing else."

"And what for?"

"To get a clew to the wooden leg."

"Well, that beats my time. Do you suppose they have stolen it?"

"Not a bit. But, do you happen to know how much of a reward your miserly father is offering for it?"

"I do not."

"A cool thousand."

"Whew! You can't mean it."

"But I do, though. Now, why is it so valuable?"

"I give it up. He must have it stuffed full of bonds, I should say."

"So I think, or something else equally valuable. What else can it be, do you think?"

"I'll never tell you."

"Well, I don't mind telling you, since you are the old man's son. It is some paper of great value. He must have it before twelve days pass."

"And you are going to recover it?"

"I am if I'm able," was the answer.

"But still that don't explain why you were at the home of Colonel Gaston."

"Can't you add two and two? Your dad has some hold upon the colonel, but he has lost the paper that gives him that hold. If he don't get it back again inside of twelve days, it will be of no use to him."

"Ha! now I begin to tumble. What is that paper?"

"That is what I want to find out. If I knew, I might find the wooden leg more easily."

"And you went to Gaston's to get some clew to it, eh?"

"Exactly. You see the old man would not let me in on the ground floor with him."

"And you found out, did you say?"

"No, I didn't say so. The girl didn't know anything about it."

"What are you going to do about it, then? You will have to hustle some, I'm thinking."

"Why, I'm going to see the colonel himself, next, and see what I can get out of him. I want to know what that paper is, you see."

"Why are you telling me all this?"

"Because I know you are interested. No paper, no marry; do you savvy?"

"You don't think so! This begins to grow interesting. How are you going to find that leg?"

"I can't do it without help, it isn't likely."

"And who is going to help you?"

"Can't you?"

"What can I do? I'd be willing enough."

"Can't you get the old man to tell you all about it? Then you can tell me, and maybe together we can get the bulge on the mystery."

"I begin to see what you are driving at. I will try it, and this very night, too. Where can I see you to-morrow, to let you know whether I have been successful or not?"

"You can drop around at the hotel about noon."

"All right, I'll do that. What hotel is it?"

Billy told him, and they planned further.

"You see," Billy declared, "a thousand dollars isn't to be picked up every day in the week, and I'm going to do my best to find that lost leg. If I do, and you have helped me, I may divvy with you. See?"

Martin Mudgeon declared that he did see, and aside from all other interests in it he would aid him all he could just for the sake of seeing him get the money.

Presently they came to a corner where Martin said he must go in an opposite direction to that taken by Billy, and so they parted.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy exclaimed, as he

Broadway Billy's Bargain.

went on alone, "but that was a lump of luck as big as a cat. Now that I've got two helpers, besides Skinny and Roger, I'd ought to begin to get a hold somewhere. There's Miss Gaston, she will try to worry the secret out of her dad, and if she does I can easily get it out of her. Then, 'the boy' will tackle the old miser for it, and if he gets it he will tell me for the sake of aiding all be can toward finding the lost leg. Oh, there is going to be some fun after a little, I'm betting. I wonder what the paper is? But, that is what I am to find out. I'll get there, if the harness holds, and then if Mudgeon is the rascal I think he is he will get dumped, that's all."

Having made up his mind that he would drop around and see Colonel Gaston at his place of business, and knowing where it was, he made that his destination.

Arriving there, he discovered it to be a large wholesale house, and inquiry disclosed that the colonel was manager of a department in it.

Asking for him, Billy was taken to an office in the rear where a man with gray hair and whiskers was seated at a desk.

Billy closed the door after him, doffed his hat, and inquired:

"Colonel Jonas Gaston?"

"That's my name," was the answer.

"I have called regarding a paper held by Selim Mudgeon."

The gentleman's hands clinched at once, his lips pressed together, and a look of annoyance came over his face.

Billy had formed his opinion of him already.

He found him a gentleman, a man worthy of his splendid daughter in every way. Honesty was plainly marked upon his face.

There was a careworn look about him that made him look heavy, and when Billy mentioned the old miser's name that look became intensified. It pained him, plainly.

"Do you come here from that heartless scoundrel?" he asked.

"Yes, and no," answered Billy. "I happen to find myself in the old fellow's employ, but in coming here I have come of my own accord."

"I fail to understand you, I fear."

"Well, the old miser has lost a valuable paper, and I am trying to find it for him."

"Ha!"

The colonel started, raised himself half out of his chair, and a bright look of awakened hope came into his face in an instant.

"And," Billy went on, "he knows that you are interested in that paper, and is suspicious that perhaps you have in some way spirited it out of his possession. I happen to know that such is not the case, however."

"How do you know that?"

"By the look that came into your face when I told you he had lost it."

"You are right. There is a paper bearing my signature, the nature of which shame makes me keep secret, and which I would give my right hand to get hold of again."

"But you have made no efforts in that direction?"

"To steal it? No, sir! Poor as I am, wronged as I have been, I still hold up my head as an honest man."

"And yet here is a paper which you are ashamed of, and which you would give your right hand to see destroyed before twelve days elapse."

Billy looked him squarely in the eyes as he spoke, as if able to read his very thoughts.

The man met his gaze steadfastly.

"Yes," he said, "you speak aright. It is a paper that was wrung from me in a moment of weakness, but one which, then, I had every prospect of redeeming within the year."

"Then there is no criminal importance to it?"

"Except in a moral way. I would risk losing my soul before I would enter into such a compact again."

"What if this paper is not discovered before the twelve days pass by?"

"In that case a weight will be taken off my mind, a rascal will have been paid in his own coin, and shame will be averted from my only child."

"Then," said Billy, "I have a sneaking suspicion that the paper won't see the light before that time. My name is Billy Weston, better known as Broadway Billy, and I am an alleged detective. I—"

"Alleged detective! Are you the young man who worked up the Cottrell case and brought out the mystery?"

"Well, yes, I had a hand in that."

"Then, if you are all the papers say of you, you must be a detective in fact. But, what were you about to say?"

"I will tell you the position I hold in this matter. I have made a bargain with Selim Mudgeon to find and restore that paper to him—No, that's a story; there was nothing said about the paper."

"You puzzle me."

"I'll make myself understood. The miser is a one legged man, you know. He used to wear a wooden leg. Now he goes it with one leg and a pair of crutches."

"Young man, are you crazy?"

"The papers didn't give any hints that way, did they?"

"No; but your talk leads me to fear you must be. What connection is there between the wooden leg and the lost paper?"

"A pretty close connection, as I think you'll agree pretty soon," answered Billy. "You see, the old miser has promised to pay me a thousand dollars if I can restore his wooden leg to him within twelve days—"

"The paper is in the wooden leg!"

CHAPTER IX.

SKINNY AND ROGER COMPLAIN.

THE colonel had been quick to grasp the truth.

Billy was glad to see him catch the idea so quickly, and to see the interest he manifested.

"That's what's the matter," the young New York detective declared, "and you can see that I'm not so crazy after all."

"I see you are not. But where is the wooden leg?"

"That is something I want you to help me find out. Will you do it?"

"I will do anything in my power to keep you from finding it, if you intend to restore it to Mudgeon."

"I intend to restore him the wooden leg, of course, and gather in his little thousand; I have made no bargain concerning any paper."

"Then you would remove the paper, eh? That would hardly be honest, young man, when you know well enough it is for the paper, and not the leg, that he offers the big reward."

"Then why didn't he make it so? No; I don't think I'd steal his paper, but if it didn't happen to be in the leg when I found it, I couldn't help that, could I? For instance, suppose the leg fell into your hands first, what then?"

"Don't put such a temptation in my way," the colonel cried, putting out his hand as if to ward it off.

"But," Billy went on, "I am going it blind till I learn what that paper is that makes it so valuable and so much a secret. I must have proof that you are the injured party before I can help you."

"Young man, that old miser has been my ruin. But that will be as nothing compared to the shame and disgrace he will bring down upon me if that paper falls into his hands within twelve days. I believe a just Providence has taken it out of his possession."

"If that's the case," said Billy, "there isn't much use of my looking for it. I never go to bucking against Providence, if I know it."

"I believe it is so. Anyhow, I have prayed earnestly enough for just that to happen."

"And yet you would not destroy that paper if Providence were to place it in your hands?"

"I would destroy it instantly—no use my trying to deceive myself or you in that. But it would be wrong, nevertheless. I don't want it to happen that way."

"Would you make it an object to any one to hold it back until it is of no use to old Mudgeon?"

"No, no. If Providence is going to help at all it will be without my stooping to anything of that sort."

"Sweet pertaters!"

"What do you say?"

"Oh! that's a way I have of going off when I'm surprised. I believe you are a white man clear through and through, Mr. Gaston. I wouldn't take any bribe to cheat the old miser out of his paper, for I'm not that sort of a rooster; but I'm not going to break my neck trying to get hold of his thousand. Broadway Billy takes sides with justice and right, every time."

"I am sure of that, from what is said of you."

"And if you are in the right, Mr. Gaston, you ought to be willing to give me all the help you can."

"And I am, my boy."

"Willing to help me?"

"Yes."

"Then tell me the secret of that paper."

"No, no; I cannot do that. What good would it do you?"

"It might help me the more toward finding it, and—"

"But, I don't want it found, Mr. Weston. You ought to understand that."

"Well, well, we won't hang fire on that point. What do you know about Martin Mudgeon?"

The colonel's face darkened instantly.

"Do you know that rascal, too?" he demanded.

"He forced his acquaintance upon me about an hour ago, sir."

"I can believe any evil of him. Why have you mentioned his hated name to me?"

"I asked you what you know about him."

"I know him to be a rascal, a worse than rascal, if possible. His father has made him more than impudent, the dog!"

"Has his eye upon your daughter, I believe."

"How do you come to know that?"

"And the old man thinks he can force you to agree to a marriage between them. A case of the wolf and the lamb, sure enough."

The colonel was greatly excited, and could hardly control himself to speak in even tones so that their conversation might not be overheard outside.

"You seem to have gotten hold of a good deal of the truth," he admitted. "I am at a loss to understand how you have accomplished it, since you say— But, never mind, the fact is there."

"I will tell you," said Billy. "I have just come from your house, where I called first and where I exchanged a few words with your daughter. When I came away I had not proceeded far when a man laid his hand on my shoulder. It was 'the boy.'"

"The boy! Yes, the Old Boy. What did he want? What was he doing there? The rascal!"

"I take it he had been watching your house. He demanded to know what business I had to call there, and acted generally as though he owned the place."

"The wretch! I'll have him arrested!"

"Putting two and two together," Billy went on, "it leads me to believe that lost paper some way concerns your daughter. Now, I have something to say to you in the way of a warning."

The colonel was pale.

"What is it?" he asked.

"That paper being lost, might they not try to get hold of your daughter and hold her? I am only giving a guess, you see."

"Heavens!" the man cried. "I had not thought of that. You are right. I am blind. They are vile enough to do any evil. I must see to it that nothing of that kind can be accomplished."

"And still you will not tell me all about that paper, eh?"

"No; do not ask it. You know enough now for all purposes. I cannot make it known to you."

"All right; but that is not going to keep me from finding out. My curiosity is now clear up to fever heat, and nothing can stop me."

"If you do find it, then I beg of you not to make it known to any one. You will understand well enough when you have read it. But I shall pray to Providence that it be never found."

"I can promise you that," Billy assured.

"And you are going now?"

"Yes; since you are not going to aid me I must look elsewhere. I'll soon be on the track of that wooden leg, I think, and then I'll know all. Whichever side is in the right, that's the side I'll be on."

Billy took his leave, his mind busy indeed.

Here was one of the most peculiar cases he had ever taken hold of in his life.

To begin with, the hunt for so odd a thing as a wooden leg was in itself a novelty, and to know that leg contained an important and mysterious paper made it interesting.

"There's a bigger in the woodpile somewhere, that's a sure thing," Billy mused, as he bent his steps toward the hotel. "It is hard to locate him, though. Hang me for a chicken-thief if it don't puzzle me. Wonder if I haven't been a little too free with my tongue? Here I have made myself and my business known to everybody I have met to-day. The first I know somebody will have me by the heels. Suppose that man Gaston is villain enough to put me out of the way just to keep the paper from coming to light. But, that's rating my own importance pretty high, I guess. No; he isn't that sort of man. I've measured him, and he's sound to the core. If there is any monkey work undertaken it will come from the other side."

All the way to the hotel he kept up a busy thinking.

"What could that paper be, that it was so important, and at the same time so secret?"

It was one that everybody seemed ashamed of, that nobody wanted anybody else to see, and yet one that must be found within twelve days.

And that was to say, it must be found if it was to benefit the old miser; on the other hand, if it did not appear, then it would work to the advantage of Colonel Gaston.

"I give it up," Billy wisely concluded, as he came near to his destination. "That's what the seasick man did with his dinner. It stumps me, but I'm going to put on the steam now and let loose the dogs of war, so to say. I'll get Skinny and the old ranger out to take a hand in it with me, and maybe by working it together we can get a hold somewhere. I'll talk it over with them anyhow."

When he entered the room at the hotel he found Skinny and the ranger with very long faces indeed.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy exclaimed. "Anybody dead?"

"Naw, nobody dead," answered Skinny, in a sullen mood and tone.

"But might as well be, 'most," added the ranger. "This hyar is dull fun."

"What are you talking about?" Billy asked. "What is the matter with you, that has put you in the dumps so?"

"Matter enough," growled Skinny. "You are having all the fun while we are settin' here and suckin' our thumbs."

"We don't want ter be too complainin'," added the ranger, "but we think we had orter be allowed ter share the danger with ye, if there is any."

"Sweet pertaters an' beeswax! Is that all you have got to growl about? Why, I thought somebody had robbed ye, or that some near relation had died. If that is all you have got to cry about, wipe your eyes. I'm going to set you at work to-night, and if nothin' bu'sts there may be some fun."

At this they brightened up at once.

"Well, I'm glad to find we can be useful as well as ornamental, anyhow," said Skinny.

"Useful!" cried Billy. "Skinny, if your usefulness is in proportion to your size, there soon won't be any room for me and Roger in the combination."

"There, now, that's enough. My size is a thing not to be talked about. If you keep on I'll make you call me James, and you know what a sticker that was when I did hold ye to it."

"Getting too big to be talked about, are you? Well, we'll let it drop, for there are other things to be talked about just now."

With that he took a seat and prepared to "orate."

CHAPTER X.

TAKING UP THE TRAIL.

BILLY held the floor for about ten minutes, straight.

His hearers gave all attention to what he had to say, in telling of his experiences. When he had done they made their comments, and it was found that all were of the same mind regarding the situation. They believed that the villain of the play was Miser Mudgeon, with his worthy son playing no second fiddle to himself. They were a bad pair.

"That's the whole thing ciphered right down fine, then," Billy finally observed. "It is our business to learn what sort of mischief this worthy pair are up to, and put a block to their little game."

"But it puzzles me ter understand what that ar' paper kin be," remarked the old ranger. "It seems ter me ter be a dockymint of no simple natur'. Why should ther colonel be shamed ter have ye know what it is, Billy? Mebby he is up ter some p'izen deal himself."

"You may be right, Rover, but I don't think he's a bad one. If he is he's the best actor I ever met in my short career, and that's saying quite a good deal, even if I am tender in years. I haven't been kicked up on Broadway for nothing. I can size a man at sight, and tell you something about his bank account, or I can survey a woman and tell ye whether she's bad or worse."

"That's so," declared Skinny, "Billy can do it nin' times out of ten."

"And not blowing, either," added Billy.

"Well, we're agreed that ther colonel is all right, then," said Roger. "Now, how are ye goin' ter tackle ther beast, me son?"

"That brings us back to business, as the jailbird said when they caught him getting away.

Have you got the old bootblack rig ready for me, Skinny?"

"No, I haven't," Skinny answered. "We got it out, but I leave it to Roger if it's fit for a tramp to wear."

"Sweet pertaters!" cried Billy. "Do you want a bootblack to wear broadcloth and patent leathers?"

"Well, no; but he ought to be togged out half-decent."

"You are growing fastidious as you grow older and get bigger," Billy laughed. "I remember the time when you used to wear your clothes tacked together in places with old nails and bits of wire."

"There were no more in mine than in yours, anyhow."

"I admit it, Skinny, freely. We used to have to take it as we found it in those days. Why, if we could have got hold of a suit as good as this last bootblack rig I laid off, we would have thought ourselves princes, wouldn't we?"

"I suppose so; but that was when we were only kids, and had no better."

"Well, it don't help things to stand around and parley with you. Where is this robe of purple and fine linen? I want to inspect it."

"It's there in the trunk, help yourself to it."

Billy went to the corner where the trunk stood, and throwing open the lid brought his old clothes to light.

"What's the matter with these?" he demanded. "There ain't many holes in 'em, not half as many as I thought, and they'll do finely. Skinny, you will be proud of me when you see me tog up."

"You ain't going to put 'em on here and disgrace us, are ye?" the fat partner protested.

"Well, that's what I had in mind to do," was Billy's answer. "If I can get out of the hotel without being killed, I won't be afraid to risk anything else."

"You will get arrested, that's what'll happen to ye."

"Then you'll have to bail me out, that's all."

"Or even if you did get out all right, you would never be allowed to come in. What would you do then?"

"Do? Why, I'd call on you to identify me, that's what, and you'd have to come out and say—'My brother Bill!' And then it would be proper for you to fall on my necktie and weep, while they burn red-fire and play low music."

"Yes, I'd identify ye, with a club."

"Then Roger would have to do it."

"If he could."

"And I don't believe it would be easy, in that ar rig," the ranger declared.

Billy inspected his outfit and pronounced it good enough, however, and laid it out ready to put on after supper.

It was after supper some time, when darkness was beginning to settle down, that he proceeded to make the change, to the amusement of the old ranger and the disgust of Skinny.

When his disguise was complete, Billy slung his box on his shoulder and gave his old-time cry—

"Shine, sir? Shine? Make 'em so pooty an' slick that yer best gal will say the word the minnit she sets eyes on ye. Shine?"

"Dry up," cautioned the sensitive Skinny. "They will think we are crazy in here."

"And won't they be right? You are about as near that as anybody I know of. This is our room, ain't it?"

"Yes; but we don't pay for the whole house."

"You want somebody to quarrel with, that's what's ther matter with you. If you are lookin' fer fight jest say so, and I'll polish you off as neat as I used to do it fer Pug-nose Jake, in the old days. If you don't believe it, jest put up and see if I can't. I don't care if you are bigger'n I am."

The old ranger was laughing his sides sore at Billy's appearance.

And he did look odd enough, truly. His clothes, which had been too big for him before, were now a little close in the fit, proving that he had grown some, and he was too big for the little box now. He would have to leave that behind.

Still, he was disguised completely, with his face liberally stained with his blacking rag, and looked younger than he was by several years.

"Do ye think I'll pass, Rover?" he asked.

"You'd pass for one of the Old Boy's imps, sure," was the laughing response.

"And I'll bet he'll get a pass to the lock-up, before he's been out an hour," declared Skinny.

"Want to bet anything on it?" Billy challenged.

So they bantered and joked for a time, until their chief called them to business.

"Now," he said, "we'll begin operations. I have told ye what I'm going to do, and since you are so determined to go into it, I'll lay out work for you to do. I don't want ye to go and get into any consarned diffikilty, though, and mebby get a broken head besides. Each of you, I'm talkin' to."

"Needn't worry about me," assured the old ranger. "I think I'm able to take keer of Number One."

"I'm glad to hear that. Skinny ought to be, too, according to his size and weight, but somehow I'm allus uneasy about him."

"Don't worry yourself about me, either," said Skinny, bravely. "I guess I am almost as likely to come out whole as you are, even if I haven't got so much gab."

"I'd hate to have any more than you have got, that is sure. But, that's off the track. You know where I'm going. Now, Roger, I want you to go with me and watch the house for Martin Mudgeon to appear, and when he does I want you to follow him and hole him. Understand?"

"Reckon I do, me son. But, how am I ter know the man? And what am I ter do after I git him holed?"

"I'll manage it so you will get a sight at him before I go in," answered Billy to that; "and when you have run him to his den you can return to the hotel, unless something you have seen or heard leads you to further investigation. See?"

"I reckon I do."

"And you, Skinny, you are to go to the Gaston residence and watch the house, and if anything out of the usual happens there you must note what it is, follow along in the procession, if necessary, and otherwise conduct yourself according to circumstances as a well-regulated detective ought to conduct himself. Do you twig?"

"That's simple enough," said Skinny.

"And you want to keep yourself out of the hands of the Philistines, as it were. Keep your eye peeled for Martin Mudgeon."

All the little details arranged, so far as they could be, the trio left the house, each going off alone, and many glances were cast at Billy as he stepped outside to the street. If a policeman had been at hand there and then, he might have been stopped and made to disclose his identity.

Billy made his way on foot to the neighborhood of the old miser's ark, where he stopped at a corner and waited for Roger, who was to meet him there.

Presently the old man came shuffling along down the street, and in a rig that made Billy laugh outright.

Nothing had been said about Roger's disguising himself, but the old fellow had evidently concluded that was the proper thing for him to do. What should be have on but a Chinaman's loose coat and a pair of Chinese shoes.

He looked about as much like a Chinaman as he did like an angel.

"Sweet pertaters!" cried Billy, when they met.

"Do you know me?" the old ranger asked.

"Know you! Bless yer old heart, Roger, what led you to put on such a rig as this?"

"Why, I got ter thinkin' about it, after we'd parted, and sez I to meself, sez I: 'I'm goin' ter be as good as Billy. I'm goin' ter be in disguise too. An'so here I am.'"

"Sweet pertaters! Ha, ha, ba! Why, you look no more like a Chinee, Roger, than I look like Sara Burnthard!" cried Billy. "It's all right, though, and I'm not going to find fault with you. Where did you change?"

"At ther shop where I bought 'em. But, I ain't changed much. I've got my coat on under this, and my shoes under my arms. If I git spotted it won't take me no more'n a jiffy ter drop this rig and be myself again. Do ye see?"

"Well, maybe the idea isn't so bad, seeing that it's night," Billy approved.

They went on together to the old miser's house, being on the opposite side of the street from it.

Not a moment too soon or too late were they, as it happened, for barely had they stopped for a survey of the place, when a man passed under an electric light on the other side.

It was Martin Mudgeon, and Billy called the old ranger's attention to him at once.

He passed on and entered the hall door of the house.

"Did you get him photographed in your mind so's you'll know him again?" Billy asked.

"You bet I did!" the ranger assured. "I'll know him as good as I'd know a b'ar or coyote, and I'll trail him when he comes out."

"All right; no more need be said on that."

head. You know what to do, now, so I'll go over and see how the tinker and his wife have made it by this time."

CHAPTER XI.

BILLY STRIKES OIL HERE.

SHAKING hands with his old friend, Billy left him and crossed the street.

Entering the hall-door of the miserable place, the first sound to greet his ears was the screaming of the tinker's wife.

She was evidently getting another "dressing down," as the old miser had once called it during Billy's visit there in the morning, and this time it seemed to be a good one.

Billy hesitated in the hall, as a stranger might, but he had not been there many seconds when the voice of the old miser hailed him from above.

"Who are you, and what do you want here?" he called out, in his cracked and squeaky voice.

"I'm a-lookin' fer a place ter lodge," Billy answered. "Are you Mister Mudgeon?"

"Yes, I'm Mr. Mudgeon. Have you got money to pay for it?"

"Yes, I kin pay ye," Billy assured.

"All right, then; come on up."

Billy ascended the stairs, wondering how the fellow had been able to hear him above the screaming of the tinker's wife.

It was a simple plan he had for that, as Billy afterward found out. A wire ran to the miser's room, and every time the door opened a little bell gave the alarm.

Billy heard the crutches thump as the miser returned to his room, and when Billy had reached the top of the stairs the old man's voice called him to come that way.

The young detective responded by following, and soon presented himself at the door of the miser's room.

There, seated on the chair nearest the window and puffing away at a strong cigar, was the miser's worthy son.

The miser stood a little back, with a candle in his hand, for he burned no gas, be it understood, and inspected Billy.

"I want my pay in advance, you vagabond," he said.

"How much is it?" Billy meekly asked.

"How long do you want to stay?"

"All night, of course."

"Oh, I don't mean that; I mean do you want to stay longer than one night? I can make it a little less if you do."

"No; only one night," Billy assured.

"All right, that will be ten cents. Give me the money."

Billy brought up some pennies from some of his ragged pockets, counted out the sum and handed it over."

"That's right," said the miser, counting after him. And then he began to call, in his high cracked tone:

"Daniel Hummon! I say, Daniel Hummon?" There was the sound of steps away up overhead, and a voice answered:

"Well, what's wanted of Daniel Hummon? Here I am."

"Here's a lodger. You just show *L* *U* into the room next to yours, will you? You know I can't get up and down handy since I lost my leg."

All right, send him up; and a pity it is that you wouldn't lose both legs and your head along with them, for botherin' me all the time. Come on up here, lodger, and I'll coop ye.

Billy climbed the stairs, while Mudgeon retired into his room muttering something about base ingratitude.

At the next landing Billy looked around for the owner of the voice, but did not see him, and was suddenly summoned to come up higher.

Climbing the next flight, the young detective came upon the strangest sight he had ever seen in the matter of lodgings. Immediately he understood what the man had meant by offering to "coop" him.

The whole upper floor was marked off into the smallest rooms that a person could possibly make out to get into and lie down. They were of cheapest boards, and were not more than three feet wide, with a bed of straw on the floor.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy exclaimed in mind, "but this takes the banner right off the rod. If the old miser ain't working this for all he is worth, at ten cents a bunk, then I'm no judge."

Daniel Hummon stood awaiting him at the head of the stairs.

A candle, hanging in a tin frame about in the center of the long hall at the head of the stairs, lighted the scene.

This hall ran across the building, with branching passages down the sides, very narrow, and another down the middle only a little wider. Along all of these halls the little coops for lodgers were arranged.

The man who awaited Billy's coming was about as wretched-looking as the old miser himself.

"You have come to it, have ye?" he greeted.

"Looks as if I've come to somethin'," Billy agreed.

"This is the last degree this side of death," the old man muttered.

"I believe you are right," Billy agreed again.

"Where is the envelope that I'm ter get inter?"

"Right around here next ter mine. I hope you'll sleep good, but if you are like I was when I first came here, I know you won't."

"Why, what's ther matter with sleepin'?" Billy asked.

"You'll most likely find out. I don't mind it any more. Ther snorin' is somethin' awful, when all ther coops are full."

"How many coops are there?"

"Well, there's four rows, with twelve to a row, and two down here in the corner makes an even fifty."

"Whew! It must be musical, when they are all full."

"You'll say so, if they fill to-night. You are early, and there ain't many in yet. They'll drop in."

"A man that could herd folks in like this must be a grasin' old miser," Billy declared with somewhat of emphasis. "He must be too mean to eat a good meal."

"And that's jest what Selim Mudgeon is, too," declared the old man in a lower tone. "He's the meanest man on God's earth, my boy. He would steal the coppers from a dead man's eyes."

"That's gettin' pretty mean, I should say."

"I couldn't begin to tell you of his meanness. And it ain't only that, but he is a rascal to boot. He was my ruin, and he's been the ruin of many another. It is strange you don't know him."

"I'm a stranger here," said Billy. "Only heard of this place by chance. Don't think I'll stop long with Mister Mudgeon. I wonder at a man of your age and decent looks stoppin' in such a den."

The old man didn't look decent, far from it; but Billy said so with an object in view. He wanted to draw him out.

"I wouldn't, either, but I have to. He has me in his power, and I can't get away. If I left him, and wouldn't lodge in his coops, he'd have me arrested."

"Arrested?"

"Yes; for debt. Once let a man get into his debt, and he never gets out again."

"How is that?"

"He's bounded to death."

They had passed around to their "coops" now, and each had taken a seat on the floor in the open front of his box.

"I thought you had no love for him, the way you answered him back when he told you to show me to my room. Room! Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's what he calls them. Room enough to lay down in, and that's about all. No; I haven't any love for him, and well he knows it. He delights in tormenting me. I am going to get even with him, though, I am going to get even with him! The worm is going to turn one of these days."

"Couldn't blame you. Who is the man in his room with him?"

"Man in his room with him? It must be the boy. Nobody else goes there, unless it's me, once in awhile."

"He was an old-looking boy."

"About forty, with waxed mustache and flash clothes? That's him. That's the old shark's son. He calls him the boy."

"He must be a character, the old one. I notice he hasn't but one leg. Must have lost the other recently, from what I heard you and him say about it."

"Ha, ha! Yes, he did lose it recently, but it was only a wooden one. And the fuss he has been making over that old wooden leg! Ha, ha, ha! You say you are a stranger here, eh?"

"Yes; and it isn't likely that I'll ever be here again. But, how did he lose the wooden leg?"

"That's somethin' he don't know, and can't even guess. Ha, ha! I like to worry the old rascal, for all the worry he has made me."

Billy's heart gave a bound. Was he on the right track of the mystery so soon?

"From what you say I judge you know something about it."

"And I do, too. Ha, ha! I will tell you all about it, if you don't mind, and won't let on. It

isn't often I meet a fellow I like to talk to. Somehow I do like to talk to you."

Just then they were interrupted by the tinkle of a bell, the sound of the old miser's crutches in the hall, and another lodger made his way up to seek his "coop."

"They'll keep droppin' now," the old man whispered to Billy. "Old Mudgeon is savin' of candles, and we're in the dark after ten o'clock. Most of them get in by that time. Poor devils!"

They allowed the lodger time to get into his "coop," and they then resumed their talking.

Billy was determined to stick to Mr. Hummon till he knew all he was able to tell him about the wooden leg.

"Well, I'm glad you do like to talk to me," Billy said, in a pleased way, "for you have interested me in that wooden leg story, and I'd like to hear all about it. You say he's making a great fuss over it. Too stingy to buy another, I suppose, eh?"

"Yes; you might be sure of that part of it; and then there's somethin' else besides, somethin' that I can't understand."

"That so?"

"Yes. He went on like a demon the morning it was gone, and I helped him hunt for it all over the house. Ha, ha! And the funniest part of it was he couldn't tell how it had got out of his room."

"Room locked?"

"Yes; doubly locked. He keeps money there, they say, and I guess it's so. He went to bed one night, with the wooden leg under his head, for a pillow as he said, and next morning it was gone. How do you suppose it ever got out of that room, with the door locked up tight? Ha, ha! I'll tell ye all about it."

CHAPTER XII.

BILLY SECURES THE PRIZE.

BILLY waited patiently for the old man to proceed.

He did not want to urge him, for fear he would become suspicious and refuse to tell what he knew.

That was not likely to happen, however, for the old fellow was of the garrulous sort, and the only reason he had not told the secret before was because he had not found a congenial person to tell it to.

"Yes; that's what puzzles him," the old lodger presently went on. "He can't imagine how it got out of that room."

"Mebbe somebody climbed in a window," suggested Billy.

"No, no; that couldn't be done without a ladder, and there ain't a ladder anywhere around. Oh, you couldn't guess it in a week."

"Mebby you had some way of gettin' into his room, and went in and took it away from him while he was asleep."

"No, no, it wasn't that way, either. Nobody could get into his room without waking him."

"Well, then, I give it up. You will have to tell me, now that you have got me so interested. I can't see how it was done."

"Ha, ha! Well, I'll tell ye now. One night I was a-layin' here awake, not able to sleep somehow, and I guess it was because the air was so bad. I have broke out a top window-light since, and that helps things. I was layin' here awake, as I say, when I heard somebody coming up the stairs. And such a-scrappin' and sliding time you never heard in your life."

"I couldn't imagine what it could be, and I got up and looked out from my coop to find out. Everybody else was snoring away like mad, and I guess I was the only one awake. It was dark, except for the little light that came in at the windows on this side, but purty soon I saw what at first I took to be a bear. It was coming along on all-fours and right down in this direction. I felt my hair raise up at first, and I got back into my coop."

"Well, it came on, and when it passed, what and who should it be but the old miser himself! You bet I wondered, then, what he was doing up here, and the first thing that popped into my head was that he was going to rob or murder somebody. And if that was the case, I made up my mind that I'd have a hand in it myself and balk his little game for him. I had my boots off, and gettin' out of my coop I followed on after him and keepin' right close behind him. I didn't make a bit o' noise, and he couldn't hear me."

"He went right on down the hall here to the end, and there he stopped. There is a chimney there, with a pipe-hole in it, and a tin cover in the hole. He went to that, took out the cover, and put somethin' in. It didn't go in easy, but after a time he made it stay there to suit him, and put back the cover and started back the

way he had come, on all-fours, or rather on three and a stump. I went after him down the stairs and to his own room, and saw him go in and heard him bolt and bar the door after him, and that was the last of him for that night. I came back up here, and then I fell to wonderin' what it was he had put in the chimney."

Billy was interested.

He saw how simple the great mystery was.

"Well," the old fellow resumed, "the more I thought of it the more I made up my mind that it must be a place where he hid some of his money, and I made up my mind further that I was going to find out. So, out I gets and away I goes to the chimney, and when I took out the tin cover and felt in, what should I feel but the club. I drew it out, when what should the club prove to be but Selim Mudgeon's wooden leg! You may well believe that I was surprised. What on earth had led him to put his wooden leg away in the chimney-hole?"

"I guess he must have done it in his sleep," suggested Billy.

"Right you be, my ragged lad. It purty soon struck me that way, too, and then I made up my mind to take the wooden leg and have some fun with the old grinder. I would give him one pretty time looking for it before I would give it up, and I brought the old leg here and hid it under my straw."

"Hal! that was good. Then the leg isn't in the chimney any more, eh?"

"No, sir; and if he should go there to look for it he wouldn't find it. But I know where it is. Ha, ha!"

"That's right. You want to keep it in a place where he would never think of looking for it, and worry him all you can. That will be just fun."

"But, what do you suppose makes him so anxious to find it? That's what I am unable to understand. It can't be for the value of the thing, for he could make one as good."

"I give it up. I'd like to see the old stump, anyhow."

"You'd like to see it? See it you shall, and that in short order. You must not let on, however."

"Ob, don't put yourself to any trouble, sir; it is only out of curiosity I'd care to look at it. If it's far away don't bother about it."

"It isn't far away, it isn't far away," the old man chuckled, and as he spoke he leaned back and fumbled in the straw of his bed for a moment, and when he sat up again he had the wooden leg in his hand.

Broadway Billy was delighted.

The wooden leg was as good as his, now.

Putting out his hand for it, the old man allowed him to take it and examine it.

This Billy did, in the dim light, critically.

It was only an ordinary, common wooden leg, with nothing to indicate that it could be in any way valuable.

On the top was a socket of leather, with straps and buckles, tacked all around the stump with brass tacks set quite close together.

"It must be for old friendship's sake that he values it so highly," Billy remarked, as he handed the leg back again.

"If it is it's pretty strong friendship, that's all," declared the old man. "I believe he has had the police looking for the thing, and I know he had one detective here nosing around for it."

"It's a wonder he didn't suspect some of his lodgers, and have the place gone over thoroughly."

"We did search it, I tell you. But I had the leg well out of sight then. He wouldn't make another search, for he thinks it's useless. You see, he can't see how the leg got out of his room."

"And how long are you going to keep him looking for it?"

"Oh, until I make him sweat a little. The more anxious he seems, to get hold of it, the tighter I'll hold on to it."

"Can't blame you, if he has served you as you say."

"And he has. Only for him I would be well-off to-day. He brought me to ruin."

"How did he do that?"

"Why, in time past he used to be more respectable than he is now, and did a sort of banking business. I borrowed money from him on security, and with an implied promise of renewal if I could not pay in full the first year, I laid in a big stock and might have flourished."

"Well, when I came to pay him at the end of the year, offering interest and a part of the principal, he refused to accept, but demanded all. His papers called for it all, of course, but I had understood that I was to have extended privileges, you understand. He forced me, sold me

out, got bold of my business for a trifl, and made a gain of five times what I owed him, and yet was not satisfied. He let me start up once more, in a small way, but somehow my indebtedness to him never got wiped out. I may have been inferior in business management, I don't know; but I do know that if I had had fair treatment I would now be a rich man instead of a beggar. He holds papers of mine even yet, and threatens to force them upon me the moment I cease to serve him. Oh, I hate him, and anything I can do to worry him, I do it."

The old man had worked himself to quite a passion, and his words were bussed forth in forceful whispers.

"I don't blame you," Billy declared yet again. "I would see him further before I would ever give him back his old stump. I would give it to the first bergar who would carry it away."

"You see I am afraid to try to smuggle it out of the house now, for if he found out that I have had it all this time he would have me arrested for a thief, and there I would be in something of a fix for the old thing. It is not all on my side after all, you see."

"That's so. But, say, give the old thing to me and I'll get it out of the house, and he'll have to whistle for it before he will ever see it again."

"Would you dare to take it?"

"I'd dare to do anything. I'm not afraid of the old rascal; he has no hold upon me."

"Well, I'll see about it in the morning. I'll think about it, and if I make up my mind to let you have it I'll give it to you then."

"All right," assented Billy, carelessly. "I don't care anything about it, you know, and only want to help you work your little spite out against the old miser."

Others had been coming in while they talked. They were of all sorts and conditions of men and boys, the poorest of the poor, evidently.

Now, finally, one came around and crawled into a bunk next to the one the old man occupied, and the conversation had to be dropped.

Daniel Hummon crawled into his coop, and Billy drew back in his, but did not lie down, and there the young detective awaited his opportunity for further work on the case.

He had no intention of leaving that den without the wooden leg, and in order to get it he would have to wait until the old lodger was asleep.

It was a long and weary wait.

The lodgers had kept on dropping in, and the candle had burned out.

It must have been near midnight when Billy heard the first indication of a snore from old Hummon's stall.

Waiting until the snoring was regular and heavy, and everybody else seemed to be asleep, Billy crept quietly out and stood in the narrow hall.

"Now for it," he muttered. "Only let me get hold of that wooden leg, and I will carry it off if it takes another leg to do it. I'll knock down the first man who tries to stop me."

With extreme care he got down and crept forward into the "coop" occupied by the custodian of the old stump.

He had to use caution not to touch him so as to wake him up, and yet had to make a thorough search for the thing he was after.

Presently he felt it.

It lay close to the wall, and the old man's body was partly on it.

Billy got a firm hold upon the leg, and began to pull, gently but firmly, in a steady way.

Presently the old man uttered a sort of moan, turned partly over, and the leg was free in Broadway Billy's possession.

CHAPTER XIII.

BILLY IS ALARMED.

BILLY'S success had come much sooner than he had hoped for. Things had not worked, here, according to his programme, but much better. He had won quick success. His intention had been to spy upon the old miser, to hear the conversation between him and his son, and to gain what he could in that way.

The most he had hoped for had been to get a clew to the whereabouts of the lost leg, and possibly to learn something about the nature of the mysterious document it contained.

He held the old stump in hand and looked at it in the dim light as if looking upon a treasure.

This was when he had stepped out into the hall with his secured prize.

"Sweet pertaters!" he exclaimed in mind, "but this has been a streak of luck. Who would have thought I'd get hold of the wooden promoter so soon? But, here it is, and now to get out

of the house with it. Hummon will miss it when he wakes up, and when he misses me, too, he will know who has taken it. But, it isn't likely that he will mention it to any one. Anyhow, he won't dare tell Mudgeon."

With the leg tucked under his arm, Billy made his way carefully along to the stairs.

Down these he passed to the next floor, then down again to the floor on which the old miser had his room, and still down to the ground floor.

Along this he passed to the front door, and when he tried the door he found it was locked.

Here was a dilemma. What if the old miser had the key, and there was no way of getting out?

And then, too, he must use care not to strike the wire that was attached to the bell in the old miser's room, or he would be in trouble immediately.

Feeling over the door carefully, Billy soon found where the difficulty was. Bolts at the top and bottom held it securely. He had only to draw them and he would be able to take his leave of the dismal den.

So he thought.

But when the bolts had been removed the difficulty was still there. The door would not open, and all his strength would not move it.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy exclaimed, "here's a pretty go, sure enough. What am I going to do about it? The old grind-hard must have the key up there in his room, and I'm balked, sure."

Broadway Billy was not one to give up, however.

He set his busy brain at work to find some plan by which he could get out of the house.

He had no matches with him, and could not have the advantage of light upon the scene, so had to do his seeing by the sense of feel, as he would express it.

He decided that it was the lock that held the door now, and in the absence of the key it was not to be opened. There was no use wasting further time there, he decided, and so went to the rear of the hall.

This, too, he found bolted, but not locked, and when the bolts had been drawn the door was opened.

While this was not so convenient as the front door, yet it answered his purpose well enough.

It allowed him to get out of the pestilential old crib.

As he swung the door open wider, however, to step out, the tinkle of a bell was distinctly heard.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy gasped, "the old rascal has a snare on this door as well as on the front. I'm in for it now, unless I can get out of this yard."

Stepping quickly out, he closed the door, and began groping around the yard in the rear. It was lighter here than in the house, of course, but still dark enough, and it was no easy thing to navigate around the narrow place and escape the broken barrels, old boxes, etc.

Only a few moments elapsed, after the sounding of the bell, when the old miser was heard to call out:

"Who is that down there?"

Of course there was no response.

"Who is it, I demand?" the now more urgent call.

"It's me!" Billy said to himself. "Give me about an hour or so more and I'll be hence."

He was still groping around, and presently he came to a darker spot and discovered that it was a gap in the fence.

He lost no time in getting through, and he was none too soon, for voices were now heard in the old den, and lights were seen. The old miser wanted to know who had rung his bell.

Would he find out?

Not if Broadway Billy could help it, that was certain.

When he had got through the fence he thought it was only out of the pan into the fire.

It appeared to him as if the people of the old barracks had taken delight in throwing their refuse over into the other yard, for here he could hardly move about at all.

A quick look around showed him a light, in the direction of the street, and he headed toward it.

He soon discovered an alley, through which the light had been seen, and in a moment more he was out upon the street and making off at a lively pace.

He did not slacken his speed until he had turned a corner or two, and considered himself at a safe distance from the place from which he had had such a narrow escape with his wooden leg.

The leg was still under his arm, little need to say.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy muttered, "I wonder what time it is, and what has become of Skinny and Roger. I hope they have not fallen into any consarned difficulties, for I want to find them at the hotel when I get there. I reckon my getting in will depend mainly on them."

He had not gone very far when he was stopped by a policeman.

His appearance was against him, and he had to be pretty civil in order not to get into serious trouble.

"Hello!" the officer exclaimed, as he stopped him, "where do you think you are going, you dirty scamp?"

Billy was prepared for this.

The only thing he had to look out for was the club, which, in the hands of some policemen, is altogether too handy.

"I'm going to the — Hotel now," he responded. "In the morning I may have occasion to drop around at Headquarters. I'll bet you can't guess who I am."

Such a reply as this took the officer by surprise, and he let go his hold upon Billy's shoulder, taking a good survey of him by the aid of a neighboring electric light.

"No; I'll be hanged if I can guess who you are," he admitted. "If I had to guess I'd say you are an imp of the devil."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Billy. "No; not quite so bad as that. Here, look at this, and satisfy yourself that I'm all right, and I'll be moving along."

With that Billy threw his ragged coat well back and displayed a badge.

It was the one he had received from the chief only a few days before, and which he had not yet handed over.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" the officer ejaculated, as he looked at it. "This is the worst get-up yet. Which one of the boys are you? I don't seem to know you."

"If you won't tell anybody I'll tell you," said Billy. "I'm that kid from New York, Broadway Billy."

"Broadway Billy!"

"Jest so."

"Give me your hand. I have been wanting to see you, but no chance offered. You are the ace of rumps, you are, with the joker out of the deck!"

He gave Billy's hand a hearty shaking before he would allow him to pass on.

Finally Billy got away from him, and he had no further adventures until he arrived at his destination.

Reaching there, he went boldly in at the main entrance, and presented himself before the sleepy night-clerk and astonished porters.

"What do you mean by coming in here?" the clerk demanded.

"A fellow 'most generally puts up where he registers, don't he?" asked Billy.

"And you don't mean to say that you are registered here, do you? Come, now, that's too much."

"Cast your eye over the book and see for yourself," said Billy. "I guess you will find me there sure enough if you look sharp."

"Confounded your impudence, anyhow! I've a notion to order you fired out. I don't believe it. No such looking beast as you ever got a room at this house, that is sure."

"Don't go too much on my looks," Billy returned. "Just look and see if the name of William Weston, New York, isn't there in a good, round hand."

"Great Scott a'mighty! You don't mean to say you are Broadway Billy?"

"This is the very individual, as big as life and twice as natural," Billy assured. "If you have any doubt about it just call up those pards of mine and they'll identify me."

"No, I won't do that; but, as I have never seen you before, I must have some proof. Just step up here and write your name for me on this slip of paper, and I'll compare it with the register. If they tally, all right."

"You've got hoss-sense, even if you do sport a big diamond," Billy declared. "I guess I can satisfy you."

Taking the pen, he dashed off his name in about the same style in which he had set it forth on the register.

The clerk compared the two and was satisfied.

"It's all right," he said, "but in that rig you are a disgrace to the house. What have you been doing this time?"

"Oh, I have been out having a little tussle with villainy, that's all," was the reply. "Now, if one of these gents can pilot me up to my room, I'll amble. I don't want to scare anybody to death."

One of the porters was told to take him up, and Billy was soon at the door of his room.

His knocking, however, brought no response, and he became alarmed.

"Sweet pertaters!" he exclaimed, "it can't be that my pards are out yet, can it? Do you know, porter?"

The porter didn't, but said he would get a pass-key and soon find out about it.

Billy went down with him, not caring to be discovered alone in the hall in such a rig as he had on.

To his surprise, he found the key of the room on the rack, proof that no one was in the room, and he was not a little alarmed.

"This looks serious," he muttered. "They went on duty when they went out, but they ought to be here now, sur. I'll make a change of clothes and go out after them."

Taking the key he hastened to his room and proceeded to make himself a little more presentable.

CHAPTER XIV.

BILLY'S PARDS AMAZED.

"SWEET pertaters!" he exclaimed, as he worked, "I wonder what has happened to them. I'm not so much worried about Skinny, for he is quite clever at detective work, but Roger is no more detective than a cow. I wouldn't be surprised if he had got into a consarned difficulty of some sort. I must get a move on me and find out."

And he made no false moves with his work, but soon appeared as his own proper self once more.

Locking the door he hastened down to the office and left the key, telling the clerk to tell Skinny and the old man to wait for him if they should come in.

He had only a limited search to make for them, and knew that if he did not find them he would have to come back to the hotel and wait for daylight, when he would have to set at work in a systematic way.

If harm had come to them, he knew it must have been through Martin Mudgeon, and he would have to find him and follow him like a secret hound until he had located the game. But, for the present, Skinny was his only hope. He would try to find him.

Accordingly, he set out for Colonel Gaston's residence at once.

Skinny had been told to watch the house, to see that nothing crooked went on there. He might be at his post yet.

When Billy arrived, however, no one was in sight on the street, and a search all around proved that Skinny was nowhere to be seen. He had disappeared.

Billy pondered what he should do.

That Skinny was not on his post, and had not returned to the hotel, indicated that something had happened.

Billy was on the point of ringing the bell and getting Mr. Gaston out, when he heard some one coming down the street, and waited to learn who it was.

By calling up the colonel he could satisfy himself whether everything was all right in his household, and might perhaps learn something that would give him the clew to the lieutenant's whereabouts.

The person drew nearer, and presently Billy made out that it was Skinny.

When they met, Skinny gave a start of surprise at seeing Billy in his proper attire.

"Sweet pertaters!" cried Billy, "what has happened?"

"The girl has been taken off, that's all," Skinny informed.

"Taken off! Where to?"

"To a house in another part of the city."

"But you followed and located it, of course, Skinny?"

"Bet your apples I did! But, you have been to the hotel, I see. Is Roger all right?"

"There's no Roger there, Skinny. That's what brought me out again, to find you and him. Have you seen him?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Oh, quite a time ago, now. It was when the girl was taken off."

"Whew! Then Martin Mudgeon had a hand in that, did he? We'll take care of that rooster, I'm thinking."

"I'm puzzled to know whether he had a hand in it or not," answered Skinny. "I can't make up my mind about that. I'll tell ye how it was."

"Yes, do."

"Well, you see I was watching the house, like you said, when a carriage drove up and a

man got out. He runs up to the door and rings, and a young woman opens it to him. He gave her a note, and she went in and shut the door after him."

"Yes."

"Well, while she was in who should come along past where I was but Roger, in the most outlandish rig you ever seen. He had an—"

"Yes, I know all about that, go on."

"Well, he seen me and stopped, and I asked where he was going, and he pointed to a fellow who had gone by on the opposite side of the street and said he was after him. I asked him if it was 'the boy,' and he said it was. A dear old boy he is!"

"You are right."

"He stopped in front of the house, in the shade of the trees, and kept his eye on the house and the man on the porch, who was waiting for the girl to come out, and Roger kept his eye on him."

"I see."

"Pretty soon the door opened again and the young woman came out with hat and cape on, and the man helped her into the carriage and away they went. For some reason the rig went slow, or Roger and I might have got left. I went on after the carriage, and Roger went with me, keeping his eyes on the man he was following."

"Exactly."

"It was quite a distance, but finally the carriage stopped at a house and the young lady was helped out, and she ran up the steps and went in, that is to say, when the door was opened for her; and that was the last I saw of her. The man got into the carriage and away it went, at a faster gait than it had come. And there you have it."

"Yes; but what about Roger?"

"Oh, yes. Well, after the carriage had gone, Mudgeon looked at the house for some moments, as if thinkin' about somethin', and then he went off, and Roger said good-by to me and went off after him, and that's the last I seen of him."

"Jest so. Now, Skinny, a few questions."

"Fire 'em in."

"What sort of reception did the young lady get at that house where she went in the carriage?"

"All right, I guess. I saw her shake hands with the one that opened the door. She seemed to know 'em right well."

"Then it's all right, I guess. What sort of looking man was the one who took her?"

Skinny described him.

"It wasn't the colonel, but I think it's all right. He's moved her away for safe keeping, no doubt."

"I haven't told you all. There was another man came out of the house about half an hour later. Maybe that was the colonel, now that you make me think of it."

"What sort of man was he?"

Again Skinny described.

"That's him," cried Billy. "That's the colonel, and it's all right. That is to say it would be if it wasn't all wrong. It's too bad the boy Mudgeon came there in time to see the carriage start off. We needn't worry any further about the girl now, but must go and find Roger, if we can."

"Where will we go to?"

"Back to the hotel first. It is just possible that he is there by this time, and anyhow he ought to be, if he hasn't got into trouble."

"And what if he isn't there?"

"Then we'll go on the war-path and find him. I'll find out from the police or the Directory where Mudgeon hangs out, and we'll go and interview him at the point of a pistol. If harm has come to Roger he is the one who knows all about it."

"That's so, and that's the way to work it."

They bent their steps in the direction of the hotel at once.

When they arrived there it was greatly to their satisfaction that they found the old ranger awaiting them.

Together they went up to their room.

"Well, Roger, what's the report?" asked Billy, then.

"I holed the rascal, just as ye ordered, captain," was the proud response.

"Good for you, Corporal Watts!" Billy complimented. "You are in line for promotion."

"Where did he go to?" asked Skinny.

"Well, he went to a sort of fancy gamblin'-house, ther fu'st place, and it was only a little while ago that he left there and went to another house whar he let himself in with a key, an' I concluded it must be his lodgin'; so thar I dropped ther trail an' kem in."

"Well done!" cried Billy. "You improve as

you grow better. I see you have laid off your fancy costume."

"Yas; I made the change after he went into ther gamin'-house, fer I had a notion he seen me afore he went in thar."

"Well, we've done a good night's work," said Billy, "and now let's catch a few winks of sleep before morning. We've got more work ahead of us."

"But, what about yerself?" asked Roger.

"Oh, it is too late now to tell about that," was the response. "I will tell you all about it in the morning, I have made progress, anyhow."

Billy being the acknowledged captain of the trio, his orders were obeyed, and they were soon in the land of dreams, where they had various experiences in hobbling around on wooden legs.

Morning saw them up early and fresh and ready for further exploits.

After breakfast Billy called the attention of his partners to something he had to show them.

Inviting them to step forward to the trunk, he threw up the lid of that useful article, and there reposed the wooden leg.

"Great ginger!" exclaimed Skinny.

"Smoke o' Gittysburg!" ejaculated the ranger.

"Why didn't ye tell us ye had it?" Skinny demanded.

"Yer hasn't treated us fair, by mighty yer hasn't," from the ranger.

Billy laughed.

"If I had told you about it then," he said, "you wouldn't have slept a wink. That's the reason I kept it to myself."

"But how did ye git it?" asked Roger.

"Yes, tell us afore ye touch it," cried Skinny.

Billy sat down on the edge of the trunk and told them all about his night's adventures, and how he had gained possession of the old miser's leg.

"And now," he concluded, "what about seeing what's in it?"

"That's what we want now, sure!" cried Roger.

"You bet!" echoed Skinny.

Billy took the leg up and examined it with care.

There was no indication of a hole in it, so far as appearance went, but by the light weight of it he knew it must be hollow.

If that was the case, then the way of getting into it must be under the cap on top, and the only way to get at it was to take the cap off.

Could they do that?

"What do you think about it, Roger?" he asked, when he had explained.

"It can be done," was the answer, "but I'm afraid it will show that it's been tampered with."

"It is all slick and smooth," said Skinny, "and any scratch on it will easy show. But, seen or not seen, we want to get into the works."

"You are right," agreed Billy. "We'll use all the care we can, and maybe it won't scratch it up bad. Here, Roger, you can have the honor of opening the thing, if you want it."

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT THE WOODEN LEG CONTAINED.

ROGER took the wooden leg in hand.

A glow of pride lighted his face at the honor that had been conferred upon him.

"I was goin' ter say, lad, that mebby I could open it better'n you, but it isn't fer ther corporal ter give advice to ther captain."

"Oh, that be hanged," cried Billy. "When you have anything to say, out with it. When we can't agree it won't be much trouble to disagree, that is sure, and no harm done."

"I opine you are right; and now we'll get down to business. If I kin draw out these nails without breakin' 'em, I think I kin make a job of it."

He had a strong knife, and using that for the purpose he began the work of taking out the nails.

By putting the blade carefully under the leather he could loosen the nails, and as the wood was soft he could then pick them out with ease.

They were all delighted with his success, and when the last nail had been removed Billy slapped the old man on the shoulder and exclaimed:

"Bully for you, Roger! Now we'll see what's in it, you bet!"

Roger lifted off the cap and handed the stump to Billy.

There in the top of it, sure enough, was a hole, and in that hole a rolled paper.

With eager ha-te Billy drew it out.

It was old and yellow, and rolled so tightly that at first it was hard to get it opened.

Not only one paper was there, as it proved, but several, and when opened so that they could be examined some of them proved to be Government bonds.

"The old rascal!" cried Billy. "This is one kind of a savings bank, hang me if it isn't! He is a sly old rat, and this is the last place in the world where any one would look for his boodle."

"How much has he got there?" asked Skinny.

"Fifty or sixty thousand dollars, I guess," said Billy, after a hasty glance.

"Whew!"

"It would be quite a find for a thief, eh?"

"You bet!" declared the ranger. "No wonder he would offer a thousand for the old stump. He is a cute one, and no discount on him."

Taking one paper from the lot, Billy rolled the bonds up and put them back in the stump, then giving all his attention to the paper he had selected from among them.

"Sweet pertaters!" he suddenly cried.

"What is it?"

"No wonder the old miser wanted it."

"What is it?"

"No wonder Colonel Gaston wants it and is ashamed of it!"

"What is it? What is it?"

"Why, it's nothin' more nor less than a mortgage on his daughter for ten thousand dollars, that's what! Did you ever hear of such a thing! Whew!"

So it was.

It was a paper of legal appearance, with seals affixed, and was a plain, straightforward mortgage.

For the value of ten thousand dollars, Colonel Gaston gave his daughter in security of payment, the mortgage to become due when she was eighteen years of age, or at any time previous in default of payment of interest.

Never had the trio, or any one of them, heard of such a thing as that. It was past belief.

"Well," asked Skinny, "what are you going to do about it?"

"That's the great question now, I opine," put in the ranger.

"Hang me if I just know what to do about it," said Billy in a thoughtful way.

"You won't deliver the paper to the old rascal, will you?"

"Nixey. Colonel Gaston and his daughter are angels to the Mudgeons, and this little thing is going to be stopped. I'd never agree to see Martin Mudgeon marry her, you bet."

"It ain't likely she would marry him."

"No; I believe she'd kill herself first. But, she won't never be troubled by this paper, that is a sure thing."

"But the leg and the bonds you'll deliver to the old skinflint, of course," said the ranger.

"To be sure. Just put that cap on the same as you found it, Roger."

This the ranger proceeded to do, while Billy sat looking at the paper in his hand in a thoughtful manner.

It was not easy for him to decide just what to do about it.

To take it, was taking what did not belong to him, but under the circumstances he felt justified.

Here was a man, the meanest of his kind, who was worth fifty thousand dollars at least, grinding other men into the dust.

Mr. Gaston had said that the paper had been obtained from him in a moment of weakness, and it was evident enough that he had paid the interest to date, a period of ten years or more.

"Never!" Billy finally decided. "Right or wrong, this paper never goes into the hands of Mudgeon again, the old villain!"

"Bully fer you!" cried the ranger. "It would be a pity ter let ther old rat have sech a hold upon as fine a man as you say ther colonel is."

"And to give him power over such a pretty girl," said Skinny.

"Right or wrong, I'll put my foot on that while I have got it in my power," Billy firmly decided. "This paper shall go into Colonel Gaston's hands within an hour, if I can find him."

With that decision, Billy folded the paper and put it in his pocket.

When the ranger had fixed the old leg up as it had been found, and had removed as far as possible every trace of its having been tampered with, he handed it over to Billy.

"Thar, take it," he cried. "It burns my hands, with all that wealth in it."

Billy laughed. Looking it over carefully, he could not see any marks on it, and after rubbing the nails a little to brighten them up anew, he wrapped the old leg in paper and laid it aside.

"Now," he said, "I'll go and pay a visit to

the colonel, and when I return we'll go and see the miser. I want you on hand to see the fun. There will be fun, I know, when we make him shell out that thousand."

Leaving them there, Billy set off for Gaston's place of business.

He found the colonel in his office, and the gentleman was glad to see him.

"I have come to tell you something important, sir," Billy announced.

"Something important? What is it?" eagerly.

"You took your daughter away last night."

"Ha! how did you come to know that?"

"No matter, since I do know it. You think she is safe now?"

"Yes; I consider her safe enough now. She is with her aunt, my sister."

"All right; I hope she is safe; but, Martin Mudgeon followed the carriage that took her there, and knows where she is!"

"You amaze me!"

"It is true, and you must warn your daughter to be on her guard. She must not allow herself to be lured away from the house. If they try to get her, that is the way they will try it."

"You think so?"

"I know it. Most likely a note purporting to be from you would be the means used. Warn her to pay no heed to anything of the kind."

"I will do so, for you alarm me greatly. I know these villains would stop at nothing, if they made up their minds to take my child from me. Would that I could defy them."

"And you can, sir."

"What? What's that you say?"

"I say you can defy them. They have no power over you."

"Ah! if I could only have proof of it. I shall know no peace till after the twenty-fifth."

"Let me post you a little, sir. You are out of their power now just as much as you can be then. That paper will never be found."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I am. But do not let on that you know it. Let matters run along till after the time stated, and then openly defy them. Then they cannot suspect that you have known anything about it before. Do you see?"

"I do—I do! If the paper is not presented by the twenty-fifth I shall know it has been destroyed, and I shall be the happiest man in the world."

"Cast your eye over this, sir!"

Billy took the paper from his pocket and laid it on the table before the astonished gentleman.

With a gasp the man clutched it, opened it, made sure what it was, and then with fierce energy he tore it into the smallest of pieces. And that done, he next set fire to the pieces, and did not speak till every particle had been burned.

As the last spark died out he drew a breath of great relief.

"At last," he said. "I have done a wrong act, but I would do it again if I had to. You know what the paper was, of course."

"I do," Billy announced.

"Then you can understand. When Mudgeon forced me to the wall I was helpless, and at his suggestion that paper was drawn up. He had the idea of a union between his son and my child. My prospects were excellent, if I could only keep on, and so the paper was drawn and signed. But, I failed, owing to his pressing me at a critical time, and I could never regain a footing. He would not allow it. Thank God I am free from him at last. I owe him this year's interest, which I shall pay, and then I am out of his power forever!"

"Has he got any proof that you owe him the money?"

"No; but the interest I do owe, and I'll pay. He has had the principal over and over again."

"Well, that's your business, and I have nothing to say. I suppose it's right. I reckon I'd do the same, even if I have stolen one of his papers."

"The thought never came to me!" the colonel cried, springing to his feet. "You have done a wrong, young man, and now I have put it out of your reach to make it right."

He was honestly troubled.

"Never mind about that," said Billy. "I weighed the right and the wrong of it before I acted. I believe I have done right. I have found the wooden leg, as of course you know."

"True, true. It never came into my mind. All I saw was that accursed paper, knowing that it was in my hands."

"Well, in that wooden leg, besides that paper of yours, were about fifty thousand dollars worth of Government bonds. I shall restore them to the old miser, and so wash my hands of the matter."

CHAPTER XVI.

MAKING SELIM DISGORGE.

COLONEL GASTON was amazed.

Billy enjoyed his surprise immensely.

"Is it possible," he gasped, "that he is worth so much?"

"It's a plain fact," Billy assured. "I'll see that he gets that back all right, anyhow."

"Yes, young man, do that. Do not let temptation stand in your way. Money is nothing compared to honor and a clean conscience."

After some further talk, in which Billy again warned the colonel to look well to his daughter's safety, the young New York detective took his leave.

"I feel a heap better," he said to himself, "and I'm glad I acted just as I did in the matter. Now to face the old miser and have it out with him. I expect some fun now, sure."

He went immediately back to the hotel and got Skinny and Roger, and in company the trio set out for the miser's habitation.

When they went in they heard the screams of the tinker's wife again, as she was getting her morning whipping, and Billy made up his mind that he would give the tinker some of the same medicine—if he could.

Telling the ranger and Skinny to follow, he ran down the hall in the direction of the tinker's room.

He had told his pards about it before, and they knew what was the matter.

Reaching the door, he threw it open, and a brutal sight met their gaze. The tinker, a big, brutal fellow, was whipping his wife with a stout stick.

When the door opened he stopped suddenly and gazed at the intruders.

"What d'ye want here?" he demanded.

The woman backed out of reach in a cowed way, and looked as if she had not an atom of spirit left in her.

"I'll show you what we want, you overgrown bully!" cried Billy. "You are a brute, to beat a woman like that, and I'm going to give you a dose of your own medicine. We'll see how you like it."

"Yer will, will yer?" the fellow cried, and he made a spring toward Billy with his stick raised ready to strike.

Billy jumped forward at the same time, escaping the blow, and giving the fellow a solid fist under the chin he laid him out on his back in a second.

No sooner was he down, either, than Billy had the cane and was giving it to him in fine style, and the coward was soon bellowing loudly and begging for mercy, which he did not get.

"There!" Billy finally cried, when his arm was tired, "you had a dose of your own medicine, and if we hear of your beating this helpless woman again, we'll put you where you can't do such business, that's all."

By this time there was a crowd in the hall, from the other rooms, and among them was the old miser.

"What have you been doing?" he asked. "You have injured one of my best tenants."

"And he'll get injured more, too, if we hear any more of his goings on."

"Allee samee sserve him light," declared one of the laundrymen.

And the others were of the same mind.

The tinker was growling to himself, and uttering all manner of threats, none of which he attempted to carry out, however.

Billy drew the old miser aside and said:

"Well, Mr. Mudgeon, I have found the lost leg."

"You have found it!" the rascal cried. "So soon!"

"Yes, sir; and if you will go with us to the office of Mr. Brandland you can get it."

"Where did you find it?" eagerly and excitedly.

"Never mind about that, so long as it is found and in good order."

"Are you sure it is in good order? Are you sure it is just as it was? You know why I ask."

"It seems to be, sir. You can judge of that when you see it, and if you are prepared to pay over the thousand dollars you shall have it."

"A thousand dollars for one day's work! That is something out of reason! I can never stand it!"

"No thousand, no leg," declared Billy. "We'll meet you at the detective's office in one hour."

"But, why didn't you bring it here? You have that paper with you, haven't you?"

"Nary paper!" returned Billy. "That is with Brandland. Don't fail to come."

The miser parleyed and scolded and wildly

complained, but Billy did not stay to listen to him, but went off with his companions.

Going to the hotel they secured the leg and went at once to the office of the detective.

Brandland was amazed when Billy unwrapped the leg and showed it to him, and was eager to learn all about it, and Billy told him the secret.

They all enjoyed a good laugh, and a little later on the miser put in his appearance.

"My leg!" he cried. "My leg! I want it right away! I want to put it right on!"

"Have you brought the money?" asked the detective.

"The money? What money?"

"Why, the thousand dollars," said the detective, in disgust. "You know well enough what money. You have got to pony up, old man, or you don't get your leg, that's all."

"Where is my leg? I don't see any leg. I want to see it."

Billy held it up to view.

"Here it is, all safe and sound," he said. "Pay over the money, and it's your stump."

"Let me have it! Let me examine it!" cried the old rascal, in excited words. "I must satisfy myself that it is all right!"

"All right, look at it," said Billy and he tossed it at him, letting it fall on the floor at his feet. This was to mark it a little, if possible, or to make an excuse for the few marks the old ranger had made on it.

The miser sprung at it eagerly, and taking it up he examined the cap with critical care.

Billy and the others watched him closely, and awaited his decision.

"It's all right," he finally announced. "It's all right, and I'll put it on. I'll feel better when I get it on."

"Just hold on a moment, if you please," interrupted Brandland. "There is a little account for you to settle before you put that leg on. We want you to redeem this bond."

"What bond?"

"I'll show you, you infernal old scamp! You have got to pay the reward you bargained to pay, or I'll take that leg and burn it up."

The old miser grew pale.

"The—the hundred dollars," he faltered. "Yes, I'll pay that. Where is the bond? I have brought just the hundred with me. Let me see the bond."

"The thousand, you mean, you old rogue. Here is the bond, and if you don't settle it, I'll arrest you here and now and put you through for it, see if I don't. You are too mean to live."

"Let me see, let me see," cried the miserable being, and he put out his hand for it. "I never signed for a thousand. The idea, a thousand dollars for a wooden leg! You must be crazy."

"If you don't put up the money, by heavens I'll fire you out of my office!" the detective threatened.

While he parleyed, too, the rascal was trying to get the leg on.

Seeing this, Billy sprung forward and grabbed it away from him, at which the old villain set up a howl.

"See here, you old grinder," Billy cried, "you and I made a bargain, and it was put down in black and white. If I restored this wooden leg to you, you were to pay me a thousand dollars. Now, it is one thing or the other. You pay the thousand dollars or you don't get your leg. No pay no leg, old Pinch-em-hard!" and Billy swung the leg menacingly before the old villain's face.

"That's it," supported Brandland.

"Give me my leg! Give me my leg!" the rascal whined.

"Of a sudden, the old miser having got up on his one foot, he gave a remarkably nimble leap forward, and his long arm and hawk-like claw reached out and snatched the paper out of the detective's hand.

It had been sudden and unlooked-for, and before any action could be taken the paper was crumpled up and thrust into his capacious mouth and he began chewing it.

"You infernal thief!" cried Brandland, flashing forth a pistol; "disgorge at once, or I'll put a bullet into you!"

"But the pistol had no terrors for Selim Mudgeon! He was able, evidently, to assure himself that the man would not kill him. He chewed away desperately, in defiance of the threat.

Broadway Billy laughed, he could not help it.

He held a weapon more potent in this case than a pistol, and that was the leg itself.

Stepping to a window, he threw it up, exclaiming:

"I'll give you just one minute to get out your money, old Shylock, and, if you do not have it

ready, I'll fire your old stump down to the street and break it in a thousand pieces."

With a wail, the old man made a rush at him, but the ranger and Skinny blocked his way.

"Fork over," Billy cried again, "or out it goes!"

"Don't! Don't throw it out!" cried the miser. "I'll pay! I'll pay!"

"Count out the duads, then, and hand it over to Mr. Brandland, and be in a hurry about it."

With trembling hands, and with his eyes fixed upon Billy, the old wretch went down into the ragged lining of his coat somewhere and brought up a flat package in brown paper.

This he opened, and from it took two bills of five hundred each, folding the package again and returning it to his pocket.

"There!" he cried, flinging them at Brandland. "There! There, robbers, robbers, robbers! Now give me my leg!"

Billy tossed it to him, and he was allowed to put it on.

When he had done so, he kicked his old crutches across the floor and made for the door.

He did not lock back until he closed the door to a crack, when he put his nose in and shouted, once more:

"Robbers! Robbers! Robbers!"

And with that he slammed the door and was gone for good. For good? No; for he came back again, later on, and stormed at Brandland concerning the loss of a paper, but he was quickly fired out, and that was the last of him.

He deserved his loss, and it might be said that he would have deserved it if he had lost everything the old leg contained.

Such men as he, and there are such, deserve the worst that can befall them.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

BROADWAY BILLY took the thousand dollars, and paid it over to a worthy charitable institution.

He had earned it, and it was his, but, considering that he had tricked the old miser in one respect, he did not feel that he should hold the prize-money.

This was done with the full consent of Skinny and Roger, who were of his opinion regarding the matter. So, while the miser was out the sum he had offered for his leg, Billy profited nothing by it.

Detective Brandland, to whom Billy had disclosed the state of affairs in the miser's house, put the police on his track, and the novel lodging house was cleared out, and the owner warned not to enter into such a business again. It was hard luck for a "poor" man.

An attempt was made, sure enough, by Martin Mudgeon, to get possession of Miss Gaston, but he was foiled, and the police being on his track, he was arrested and sent up for that and other offenses.

On the twenty-fifth of the month the old miser called on Colonel Gaston.

He found the colonel in a sad mood, apparently, and could not suspect that he knew anything about the missing paper.

Gaston told him he could pay the interest, and would, for the last time, but that was all he could do. If he was mean enough to foreclose, he would have to do so, but if he did, he meant to fight it in the courts.

And what did the rascally miser? He took the interest-money, the last he would ever get out of his victim, and said that he would consider the score settled. He had destroyed the mortgage, he said, and so he, the colonel, was released. And then he asked the colonel not to push the charge against his son.

In reply to that, Mr. Gaston informed him that he had nothing to do with the case, that it was an affair the police had in hand themselves, and he would have to go to them. And then thanking him for his generosity in destroying the mortgage, he showed him to the door and out. And the miser took his leave, hobbling away on his wooden leg, and his fortune in bonds. And so he hobbles out of mind.

Billy, Skinny, and Roger, their pard, for a few days more enjoyed all the delights Denver has to offer her visitors. The young New York detective had made himself solid with the police, and was known wherever he went. But, the trio could not long be idle. Billy's detective fever began at length to burn in his veins, and we may therefore be certain that he dragged his pards, ere long, into another "circus."

THE END.

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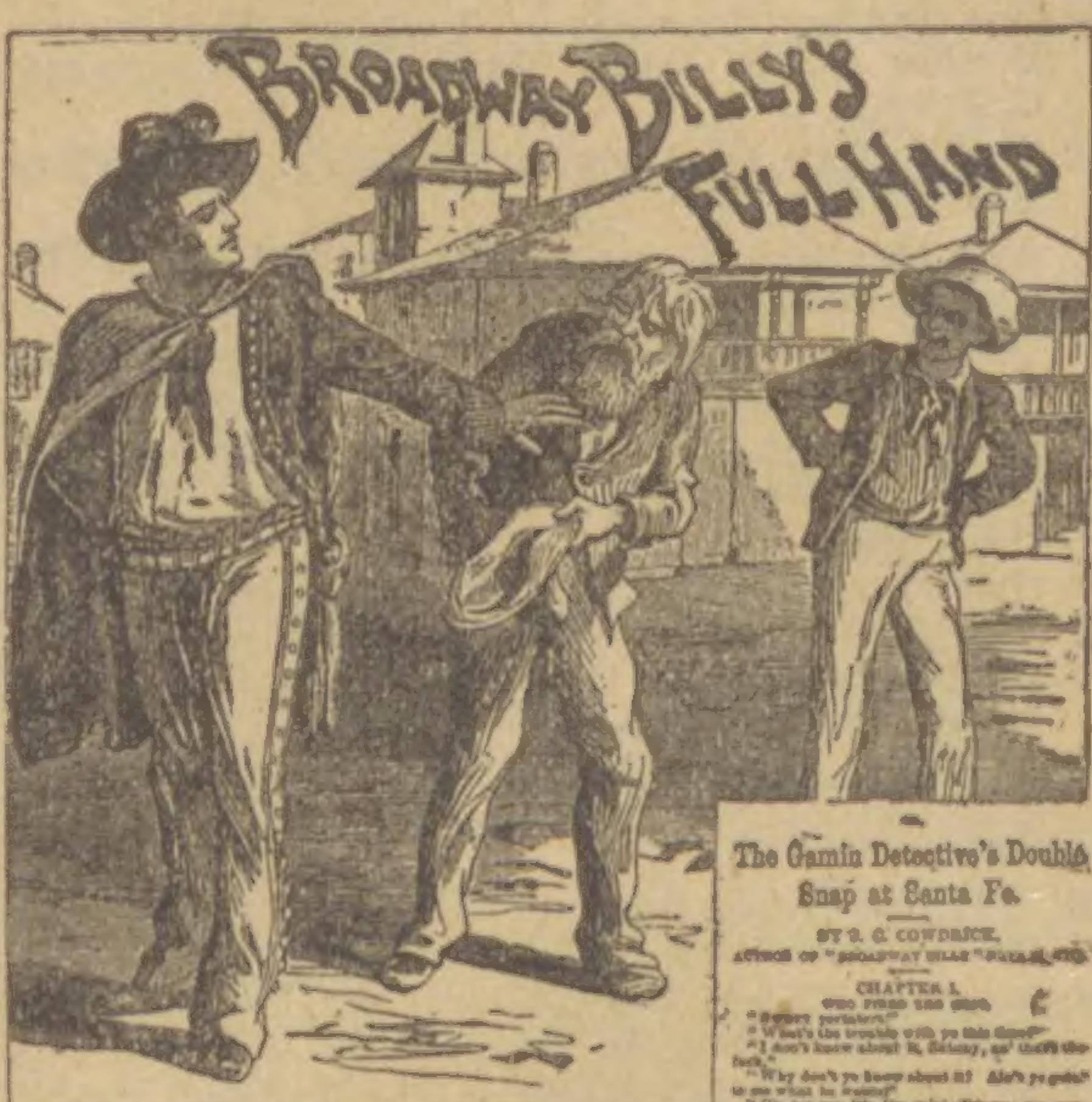
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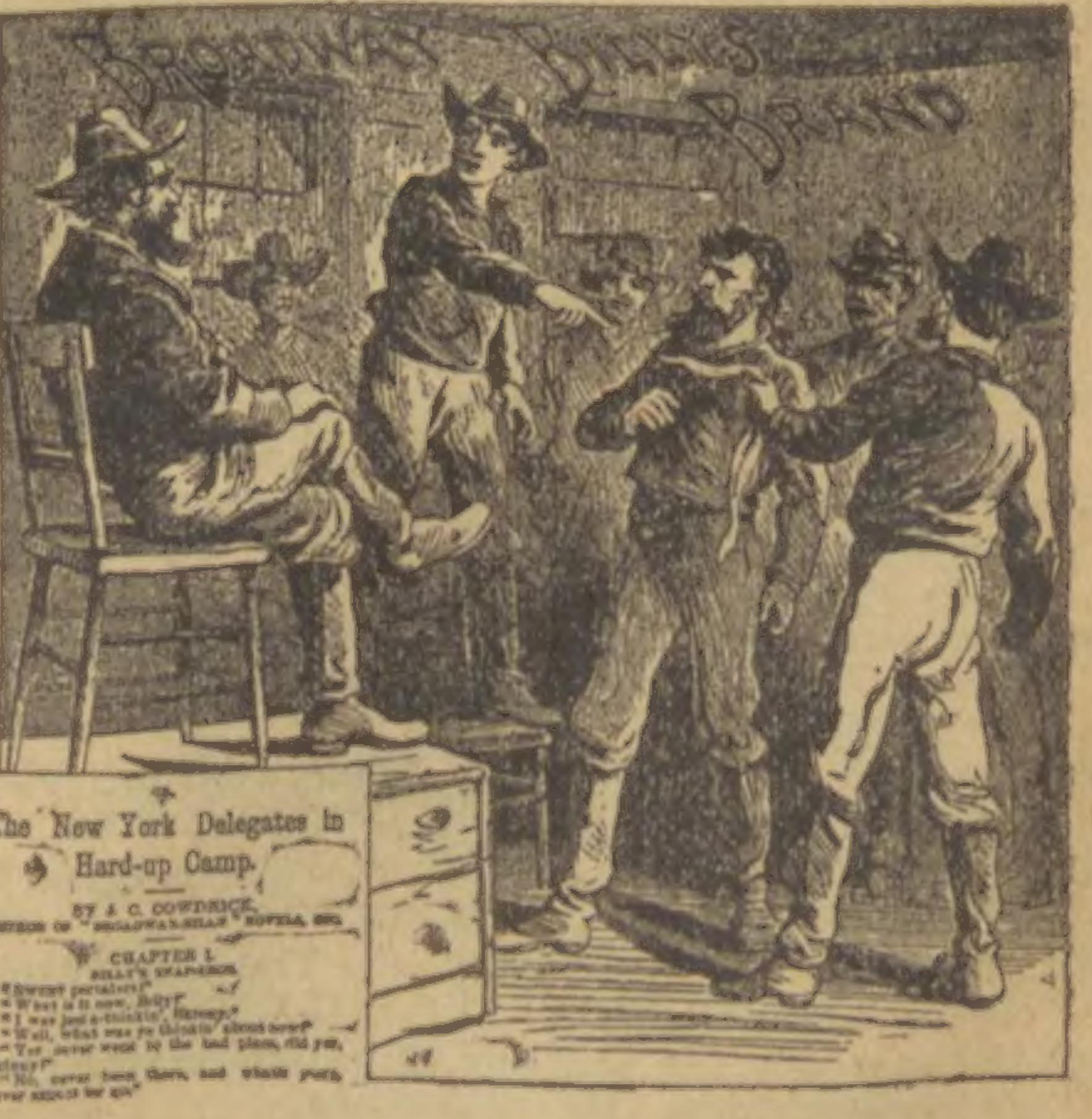


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